

THE NEW WINDMILL SERIES

General Editor: Ian Serraillier

BLOW THE MAN DOWN

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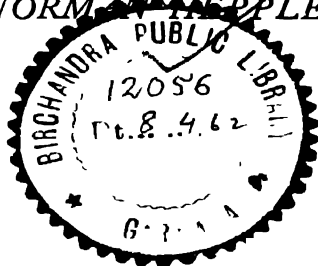
CHARLES VIPONT

BLOW

THE

MAN DOWN

ILLUSTRATED BY
NORMAN HEPPLER



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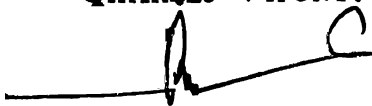
FOREWORD

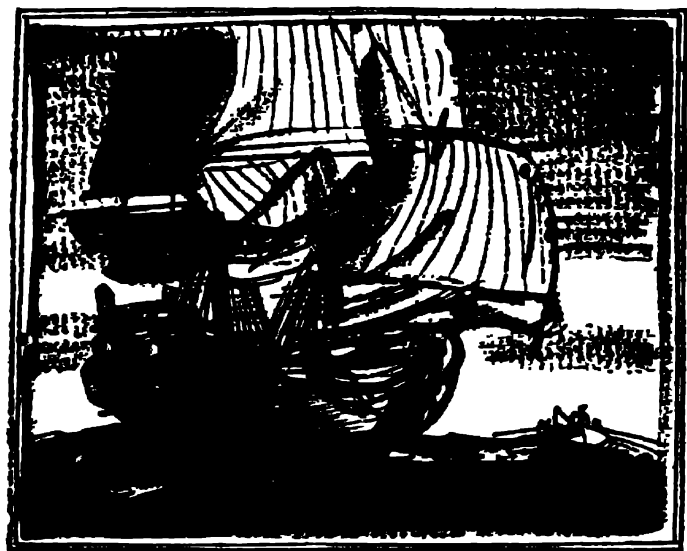
DEAR OLIVER,

I have followed your advice and written this book. You may not be aware that you have ever given me such advice, but that does not matter; the responsibility is yours. I dare not bore you with a preface, so I am writing this to assure you that all the most unlikely things in the book are true; Thomas Lurting did brave the captain on his own quarter-deck, and that queer boat-load of ten pirates actually was piloted along the Barbary coast by a Quaker seaman with a crew of two men and a boy. And Thomas Lurting's adventures with the press gang occurred just as they are set down here. It is not only in books but in real life that the unlikely things happen. Remember that when next you ask how to make fireworks.

Your sincere friend,

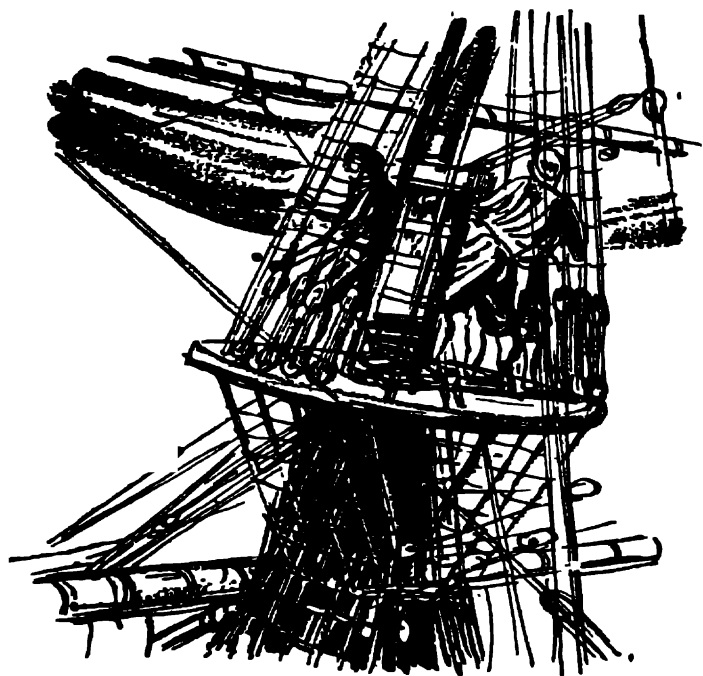
CHARLES VIPONT.

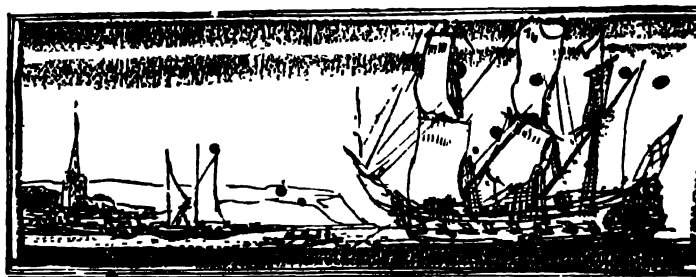
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'C. Vipont', written over a horizontal line.



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CHAPTER I

I leave Home

IN the south-west of England, near the little seaport of Belmouth, lies a fishing village called Paget Point. A rocky headland juts out wickedly into the sea, and behind it cluster the fishermen's cottages, crowding up along the steep path which leads down to the old grey harbour. Farther along are brief stretches of fine, white sand, and tumbled rocks and caves, and all along the coast tower massive cliffs which look unscalable, but where, nevertheless, a venturesome boy with naked feet may clamber like a goat in search of sea-gulls' eggs. I know, for I, Richard Croly, lived there myself as a boy, in the old Commonwealth days, and I used to be sent to look for the eggs by my Uncle Matthew, who had a passion for such fishy delicacies.

I hated my uncle. God forgive me, how I hated him! As I first remember him, he was a stern,

elderly man with grey hair and beard, cold grey eyes, and an unconquerable dislike for small boys. All innocent games and amusements were most puritanically frowned on, and 'I was for ever being hauled to the Presbyterian meeting-house to listen to long prayers and sermons, on pain of a thrashing if I fidgeted. To be sure, I was a troublesome young rascal. I would sing loudly about the house, because I knew my uncle disliked it, and the more he thrashed me for it, the louder I sang. My education, for the most part, he left in my mother's gentle hands; she taught me to read the Bible and to write and cipher, and all that I learned from her I learned willingly and well. But I soon found that there were other things to read besides the Bible, and many a time would be caught by my uncle and well whipped for reading some old book of poetry or adventure, or even stage plays, borrowed from young Harry Greenwood, the former vicar's madcap son. Not that Uncle Matthew did not do his duty, by me in other ways. He taught me to speak the truth, to fear God (though not to love Him), and to know the ways of wind and tide and weather. Under his stern tutelage I learned to know one end of a boat from another, and to handle a rope, though in the course of it I often knew the feeling of a rope on my shoulders only too well. Many a time I shivered all night long

on the deck of his fishing smack and wished myself well out of it, and yet I still have reason to be grateful that I was hardened to the sea at an age when many boys are scarce breeched.

My mother had one of the sweetest faces on God's earth. She was thirty-five years younger than her step-brother, a slip of a woman with soft brown curls and mild blue eyes. Though she stood greatly in awe of him, there was a deep bond of affection between them, for all they seemed to belong to two different worlds. He was a Paget Point man through and through. My grandfather had been one of the fishermen there, like his fathers before him, but had lost his right arm in the great sea fight against the Spanish Armada, through leaping forward to save the life of a young gentleman when the foremast came crashing down. Old Lord Fayne, the young gentleman's father, had set him up afterwards as an innkeeper at Fayne, so that Uncle Matthew's boyhood was spent inland, far away from all those things which were the very stuff of his life. When he was in an expansive mood, he would tell me how he had run away from home in his early teens, and found his way back to his birthplace and the sea.

I knew very little of my father. Uncle Matthew never spoke of him without cursing him, my mother never without tears in her eyes. Theirs

had been a secret match, for in the eyes of the world it was ill assorted. My father, Lord Croly, of Croly Chase in Buckinghamshire, was a cousin of Lord Fayne's, and had been brought to his house by slow and painful stages after Marston Moor, in which battle he had been grievously wounded. Fayne was a quiet backwater, far from any place of importance, and nobody bothered about the civil war, except in so far as it affected cattle prices and harvesting. Pretty Mary Linday, the old inn-keeper's motherless daughter, was a favourite up at the great house, and helped to nurse the fugitive. How he persuaded her to run away with him, none could ever tell; the truth is that so she did, and the truth also is that they were married secretly, but lawfully in the sight of God and man.

I often thought about my father, and echoed Uncle Matthew's curses. Some day I meant to seek him out and fling them in his teeth. For he deserted my pretty young mother not long after my birth, leaving us in the care of a rascally agent of his, while he took horse for the coast, and set sail for France. One letter came with money in it, and after that nothing, till a great dread laid hold upon my mother, and she packed up her pitiful belongings, took me upon her arm, and fled. Her old father had died of a broken heart; there was

nothing for her to do but to take refuge with the step-brother whom she had never seen.

I grew up happily enough, a bare-footed fisher lad amongst other fisher lads. Perhaps I should have been happier still could my mother have kept secret the truth about my birth. But there were a hundred little ways in which she could not help remembering it, and inadvertently reminding me of it. Besides, she always fondly hoped that some day my father would acknowledge me and restore me to my rightful position as his heir. She desired nothing for herself. But between her secret resolve to make a gentleman of me some day, and my Uncle Matthew's open intention to thrash the original sin out of me, I should have been hard put to it without the gay companionship of the other boys on the beach. Together we tumbled in and out of mischief like the healthy young animals that we were. I think perhaps the difficulties of my home life (so complex when compared with theirs) made me eager to excel amongst them; as if by proving myself the bravest swimmer, or the swiftest runner, or the most daring climber, I might ensure my position in their comradeship, and so make at least one part of my life secure.

I must have been about eleven and a half when the news came. It was only a rumour, but it spread swiftly as all rumours do. Before a week

had gone, everybody in the village knew that, out in the great world, my father was said to have married a noble French lady, thus repudiating his marriage to my mother. On the day I first heard of it, I had fought half the boys in the village before ever I reached home.

'It's a foul lie, Mother!' I cried, as I burst in through the half-open door. My mother drooped her head and cried, whereupon I broke into swearing, and was properly thrashed by my uncle for using bad language. I think he was glad to have some object upon which to relieve his feelings; he was genuinely fond of my mother, and half his harsh treatment of me was to be laid at the door of his hatred for my father.

From that day life at Paget Point was changed. I would play with no boy who believed the story and thus insulted my mother, and so, little by little, no boy would play with me. Half the village began to whisper that Mary Linday's marriage had been so very *secret*, maybe it was no marriage at all. Surely it would have been very strange if one of your high and mighty cavaliers like Lord Croly had stooped to the likes of her! In any case, poor innocent, what proof had she, to be sure?

Most of our neighbours sincerely pitied her and were kind to her in their fashion; they reserved their dislike and disapproval for me, and pro-

phesied that I would come to a bad end.' Uncle Matthew became stricter than ever, and forced me to read sermons till I dropped asleep across the page in utter weariness, whereupon he cuffed me to waken me, and made me stumble on. The village boys leagued themselves against me in the brutal way young things have. They would waylay me on the shore and call me foul names; when I dashed at the ringleaders in desperation, they would all fall on me and beat me. One boy, called Larry, I grew especially to loathe. We had been great friends, he and I, for he was the only son of a widow, which seemed to give us something in common. He was two or three years older than I, a fine, handsome lad, and a great companion for birds'-nesting and adventures. But the tide was too strong for him; he turned against me with the rest, whereupon I hated him most of all. In all my losing battles I counted one point well won if I could land a blow on Larry's freckled nose before I went down under the gang.

One day my uncle sent me along the shore to the cliffs, to gather sea-gulls' eggs. I knew better than to look for a companion; I was glad enough to reach the cliffs without mishap. Sure-footed as a goat, I clambered upwards, my troubles slipping away from me as I went. I had soon found eggs enough and to spare, but even so I was in no hurry

to descend. For a while I rested on a narrow ledge, looking out over the sea and across to the headland, behind which our little harbour lay. Many a time I would idle there and see nothing but an odd fishing smack creeping along, but this time I was in luck, for a noble frigate was coming in, as fine a ship as I had ever seen.

'She's run out of water,' I thought, 'or perhaps it's victuals she's after. But if it's men she's wanting, God send she takes my Uncle Matthew!' Which goes to show that I was an irreverent young pup, and deserved my uncle's beatings.

I climbed down at last, and taking the eggs out of the breast of my shirt, wrapped them up in the big handkerchief I had brought for the purpose. I found a bit of bread in my pocket, and munched it as I went along. I can still remember the taste of it, fresh and salty like all my mother's good bread, with a fine crisp crust on it for a lad to get his teeth into. I can still sense the feeling of the fine sand as it curled about my toes. I felt very happy just then. I swallowed the last mouthful and began to sing at the top of my voice; then I rounded the headland, to find my enemies awaiting me. My song stopped in mid-flight; for the first time I was afraid of them. They were between me and the village, the tide was fast cutting off my retreat, and the cliffs near at hand were unscalable. I had



A noble frigate was coming in

thought all the boys would have been thronging round the frigate in the harbour, and cursed my luck to have been thus caught unawares. My first impulse was to avoid a fight, for if the eggs were broken on the way I would certainly get a thrashing. I held my bundle firmly and began to whistle as I walked towards them, avoiding their eyes as best I could. First one, and then another began to jeer.

‘Where’s your father?’

‘Haven’t you sent him a wedding gift yet?’

‘No, he’s getting his mother a wedding ring!’

‘But haven’t you heard? She’s a ——’

I made one mad rush and somehow or other broke through them. They scattered for a moment and then were hard at my heels. Crash went the eggs as Larry snatched at my shoulder; I made a leap at the cliffs, tore at the rocks with bleeding fingers, clung on somehow, sobbing all the while with fury, and then suddenly heard a voice saying: ‘Come, lads, twenty to one isn’t fair!’

I heard a scuffling down below, and twisting round on my scanty perch, saw a tall seaman administering such punishment to my tormentors that in two minutes’ time there was not one to be seen. He caught Larry as he fled and gave him a last box on the ears; then he turned to look up at me where I clung.

'Come down!' said he.

It was the voice of one accustomed to command. Nevertheless, I hesitated to obey. I felt safer where I was. I had no time to think twice. He strode to the foot of the rock, reached for my ankle with a strong brown hand, jerked me from my hold, and caught me as I fell. I gave up the struggle and stood limply before him.

'What was it all about?' he asked.

'They always fight me!' I muttered.

'Why?'

'They say things about my mother.'

'Well then, pitch into 'em, boy, don't run away!'

'I never ran away before!' I cried hoarsely, and fell to swearing at him.

'Stop that!' he said firmly, and took me by the shoulders. I flinched a little, expecting a beating, but he merely looked down at me for a moment with an odd smile. I looked up at him then. He was a tall young fellow, about twenty-five years of age or thereabouts, with a shock of tousled hair and keen blue eyes that had warm depths in them, like the sea. I liked him.

'You don't come from hereabouts. Who are you?' I asked.

'Thomas Luring's my name. I'm boatswain's mate on the frigate yonder. Who are you?'

'Richard Croly's my name, and those who say it isn't can go to ——'

'Stop a minute, young man, and let's begin at the beginning.'

He walked towards the village with me slowly, while I poured out my little story. As we neared the harbour he stopped with his hand on my shoulder. 'Never run away, son!' he said quietly. 'Not from your playmates, or your uncle, or the devil himself. And never show fear. And when you're going into action, do what our Admiral Blake does.'

'What's that?'

'Wait upon God.'

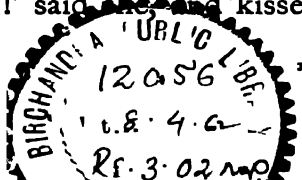
'I don't believe in God. He's too like Uncle Matthew.'

'Then you must sail the seven seas, my lad, until you find One who isn't.'

He shook hands when we parted, and went to gather up his men. I ran up the street towards the lane which led to our cottages, my heart gradually sinking into my toes. When I looked round the door, I saw Uncle Matthew sitting at the table with his Bible before him. My mother was knitting in her chair. It struck me then how peaceful and happy they looked without me.

'Good evening, Mother!' I said.

'Dear Richard!' said she, and kissed me. She



never called me Dick. She had called my father so.

Uncle Matthew slowly removed his spectacles. 'I trust you have spent your time profitably, dear boy,' said he. 'If not in prayer or praise, in labour for the meat which perisheth. Where are the sea-gulls' eggs?'

I shifted from one foot to the other. 'Uncle, I had some!' I explained hastily. 'A bundle of the finest ones you ever saw. I climbed high to get them. But every lad in the village was out to chase me when I came down. I tried hard—but—there wasn't one—they were all broken——'

My uncle said nothing, but rose slowly and reached for his rope's end.

'Uncle, I couldn't help it!' I pleaded, backing away from him. 'There were twenty of them—I tell you—I had the eggs——'

My uncle stood up and took me by the arm. He seemed to tower over me. I could scarcely see my mother where she trembled in her chair, with her knitting strewn about her on the floor.

'Once and for all,' he growled, 'I'll stop this fighting, this playing of impious games with the riff-raff of the foreshore—this lying—this——'

'You're the liar, Uncle!' I screamed, beside myself with fury. 'I did get the eggs, and I'm glad they're broken! I'm sorry I ever got them for you, and I'll see myself further before I fetch any more.'

You'd as lief I was killed getting them as not. 'You know you would, you black-hearted old devil! And you'd go on reading your Bible—and letting people say things about my mother—and——'

I got no further. The rope's end came down with a vengeance. I hit out at my uncle with all my puny strength, and then down it came again, and the sense was wellnigh knocked out of me. After that I think we both went mad. When it was all over I was shoved up into the loft, bruised and bleeding, with my clothes torn half off my back. I caught one pitying look from my mother. I think we were both glad of that afterwards.

As soon as I was sufficiently recovered I crawled to the window and opened it, to breathe in the fresh air. I felt very sick. It was a tiny window, but I had often been through it before. To-night was a different matter, and my foot trembled as I reached out for the gnarled bough of the old pear-tree. Through God's mercy I found it, and down I swung, and so limped along towards the village. I had no idea of where I was going.

The harbour was all in an uproar. A boat had come in from the frigate to look for volunteers, and several of our fisher lads who had been so unwise as to drink with her crew were now sitting in the stern, looking very drunk and fuddled and sorry for themselves. Thomas Lurting was no-

where to be seen. He had been hunting victuals, not seamen. I hovered disconsolately on the outskirts of the brawl which was going on. Why couldn't they take Uncle Matthew? But what would become of my mother if they did?

Suddenly I heard a shrill scream and Larry raced across the street with a very red face, with the lieutenant and two seamen in full pursuit, and his poor mother at their heels in tears.

'Leave my boy alone!' she shrieked. 'He didn't know what he was doing, I'll swear he didn't! You wouldn't take a poor widow's only son, would you?'

'On the contrary,' laughed the lieutenant, 'we'll make a man of him for you! This way, men!'

He stood back coolly and waved his men on, but before they could get any farther I caught the foremost of them round the leg and tripped him up, whereat the other came tumbling down on top of him.

'Run, Larry!' I shouted. 'Run!'

Swearing profusely, my victims were up in a minute and had me in their grip.

'Take me if you want a boy!' I screamed. 'I'm younger than Larry but I'm twice as tough. And I may as well go to sea as go to the devil!'

'Take the little spitfire!' snarled the lieutenant. 'We'll soon cool his courage for him. He looks as

if he knows a rope's end already, but he'll know more before he's through.'

The man I had tripped up lifted me roughly in his arms and pushed through the crowd on the wharf. All about me men were arguing and fighting, and frightened women were running to and fro, weeping or cursing according to their natures. Out in the bay the frigate was hoisting sail. A big, good-natured fishwife who had shown me many a kindness clutched at my captor's arm.

'Do you press babies now?' she jeered. 'His mother's milk is scarce dry on his lips. Oh, you're a fine lot in the navy, curse you!'

The seaman swore roughly at her and pushed her aside. 'Over you go!' said he, and suddenly threw me over the wharf-side into the stern of the boat, My head struck sharply against the gunwale and I knew no more.

CHAPTER II

On Board the Frigate

WHEN I came to myself, I was lying on the fore-castle deck of the frigate, wringing wet from top to toe. I must have had several buckets of salt water thrown over me, by the feel of things. I tried to move, but experienced such pain in doing so, that I nearly fainted again. An angry voice was snarling above my head.

'I send you ashore to bring in a few recruits against them that died of the sickness, and you must needs start brawling through the harbour like the sons of Belial that you are. And what's this you've brought me? Were ye so drunk that ye could not tell a live man from a dead boy?'

'He weren't dead when we took him, cap'n!' growled the surly voice of the seaman who had thrown me into the boat. 'Ask the lieutenant here if he didn't bring me down to the ground! I'll wring his little neck for it one of these days, if he lives and if he escapes hanging meanwhile. But we never forced him, sir; he'd give us no peace till we took him, would he, mate?'

'Jake's right!' rejoined another voice. 'Flung himself into our arms, he did, squealing like a hell-cat. We took him for twice his size.'

'Twice his size!' sneered the captain. 'Two of him, you mean! We'll string you up to the capstan and see how many of him you see then. Twice his size! I wouldn't luff and put back into harbour for him if he were as big as an elephant.'

'No need of that in any case, I think, sir!' said a quiet voice above my head. 'By the look of things he's not wanted on shore, and I can make some sort of use of him afloat. Let him stay.'

I opened my eyes then, to find that I was lying with my head on a man's knee. Looking upwards, I found him bending over me, and his face was one which I already knew. It was the face of Thomas Lurting.

'Leave him to me, sir!' he urged.

The captain walked over to the starboard gunwale and looked back towards the coast. We were travelling swiftly, with all sails set. Ours was a nasty little harbour to make when the wind was blowing off the land. My head was clearing now, and I struggled to sit up.

'Please, sir!' I cried.

The captain strode back again. He was a little man with a spare face and a straight mouth and a nervous tic in one cheek. 'Well!' he said impatiently!

'Please, sir, I am willing enough to serve, and have been to sea many a time with my uncle. And

Uncle Matthew doesn't want me—and—he would be kinder to my mother if I wasn't there!

'How old are you?' asked the captain.

'I shall be twelve come next winter, sir!' said I.

The captain was about to speak, but the chaplain interrupted him. 'But what of his eternal welfare?' he inquired in sonorous tones.

'Ay, what of his eternal welfare, brother?' echoed the captain, and drew himself up impressively. Several of the seamen who had been hanging around now grinned secretly at each other and slouched away. From which I gathered that the captain was one of the preaching captains so often to be found in the navy during the Commonwealth, though whether they were any worse than the drinking, swearing, make-a-leg, fine gentlemen captains who followed them, is more than I can say.

'What of his eternal welfare?' insisted the captain. 'Shall we take him from his father's care, his mother's love, the godly preaching of the village meeting-house——'

'My father is in France with the King, and doesn't know if I'm alive or dead!' I declared hotly. 'And our Presbyterian priest is a devil and I hate him!'

Up went the captain's hands, and the chaplain wrung his in dismay.

'His father a malignant!' exclaimed the captain. 'And his only religion an aversion from the ungodly Presbyterians! Heaven has sent him to us!'

'A brand snatched from the burning!' cooed the chaplain. 'To be converted by our godly Baptist preaching!'

'Shall I be responsible for him?' asked Thomas Lurting quietly.

'Ay, Thomas!' rejoined the captain. 'As an honest man and a good Christian, ay! See that he diligently attends all public worship, and whip him soundly for referring to Charles Stuart by the vain title of King.'

'The beating might wait a little, perhaps, sir,' observed Lurting. 'The lad is very sore.'

With that he rose to his feet and jerked me dexterously to mine, at the same time giving me a peremptory little push towards the captain, which I gathered meant that I was to make some sort of apology to him. My head was swimming, but I did my best.

'I am sorry, sir!' I mumbled. 'I didn't know any better—I—' Suddenly I caught sight of a sandy-haired, scrub-nosed boy behind the chaplain. He was making gestures to attract my attention, pointing to the captain, and then folding his hands in an attitude of mock prayer and turning his eyes up.

My fuddled brain at last grasped what he meant. 'I hope to learn much from your preaching, sir, and the good chaplain!' I added. 'I'm very grateful, sir, and I hope you'll pray for me—and—I'll try to be a good lad.'

I swayed on my feet and Lurting put out an arm to steady me.

'Take him below, good Thomas,' commanded the captain. 'The beating can wait awhile. Set him to work as soon as he is able, and mind you work him hard. And spare not the rod, good Thomas; here is a soul to be saved!'

If beating could have saved my soul, I should have been saved long ago, I thought, as I tottered down to the surgeon's quarters with my guide. The surgeon, a good-natured fellow with a hearty laugh, did not waste much time over me, but washed the wound on my head well with salt water and then plastered it up. He pulled off my shirt to look at my back, but only laughed and swore, and vowed I would have many another like it before my time was served.

As we were leaving the surgeon, a light figure came flying along the gangway and fell precipitately into Thomas Lurting's arms.

'Avas there, Ned!' said he good-humouredly. 'What is it this time?'

It was my snub-nosed friend again. 'Only a

matter of chickens for the captain's table, sir!' he panted. 'The rats got one of them while I——'

'While you were idling on the fore-castle deck,' interrupted Lurting imperturbably. 'I saw you, you lazy young scoundrel!'

'Then the cook was an idler too, no doubt, for I saw him there if you didn't!' grinned the youth. 'But for all that he must needs set on me with a saucepan.'

'And you deserved it richly!' smiled Lurting. 'If you and I meet not on Black Monday, it will not be for lack of trying. Take this lad along and show him his quarters. His name is Richard Croly.'

'Of Croly Chase, no doubt, in Buckinghamshire!' jeered Ned. 'Oh lor!'

He got no further, for I set on him at once, and Lurting had to knock our heads together to part us.

'No more of this,' he commanded, 'or you'll get more than's coming to you. Off with you!'

Poor Ned Farrant! If any lad in the navy had more beatings than he in the year, I should be at a loss to find him. And if any lad ever breathed who had more of the spirit of true mischief running through his veins, or was a better fighter, or a truer friend, I should be at a loss to find him too. He and I had fought together and made it up a dozen times in the first week, and so we were

sworn friends. His friendship stood me in good stead with the other boys, for though I fought them all fairly in turn, and took and gave punishment as it so fell out, yet they never set upon me in a body but Ned would come flying to the rescue, and valiantly turn the scales in my favour. Yet when I say I fought them all in turn, I forget to make one exception; in all those first wild days at sea I never fought Christopher. A heartless little ruffian I may have been, but I never fought Christopher.

Christopher Mallory was the chaplain's boy. Like Ned he was nearing fourteen, but small for his age and very thin, with an odd little limp to his walk, and a troublesome cough which kept us awake at night. We often wondered how he came to be at sea. He had an easier life than we had, but even so it seemed to tell on him. He had a passionate love for books, and the few whippings he ever had were for stealing them from the officers. But he carried a library in his brain, and would often spin out long passages from the writings of a fellow called Shakespeare, of whom Harry Greenwood had once told me. And sometimes he would scribble verses on the fly-leaves of the chaplain's books, having no better paper, and would afterwards get miserably thrashed for it.

The whippings in the navy would have dis-

mayed me more had I not been brought up by Uncle Matthew. Nevertheless, the first time I saw a grown man flogged at the capstan wheel I was very promptly sick, and got my ears boxed afterwards for my pains by Thomas Lurting. Lurting had constituted himself my guardian as well as my master, and I think I owed it to him that I escaped punishment on the first Black Monday, when my back was still unhealed from Uncle Matthew's beating. Certainly as a rule Christopher seemed to be the only boy that was not regularly whipped on Monday morning. Some of the older sailors vowed that the ship would never have a fair wind without it.

Not even the whippings served to damp Ned's spirits. He exercised his wits upon all and sundry, myself included, and his teasing ways soon got us into serious trouble. Like most English lads, Ned had a turn for music and knew a store of songs, both of the country and of the sea. In some idle moment—and somehow or other Ned could always find plenty such—he had made himself a pipe, and would often entertain us with tune after tune until Thomas Lurting caught us idling. Now what must the young rascal do but invent a ballad on my name, to the old Hampshire tune of 'Aboard as I was walking', and with this he would plague me whenever he was in the mood.

What's amiss with Richard Croly?

His head is rather thick;

If he'd only known the deck wa's so rolly

He wouldn't have been so sick.

Send him back to home, and Father

Ere he doth expire;

Let 's send Richard Croly rolling

Back to Puckinghamshire.

Now Ned knew nothing of my story, and how he knew that there were Crolys in Buckinghamshire was more than I could guess, but the very sound of that song used to send me into a fury. Ned would hum it under his breath, or whistle it, or walk along the deck on his hands and come up singing it, or play it on his pipe when I came by. It was a tricky little tune, and the other lads soon caught on to it. For two or three days I put up with it except for an occasional scuffle, and then one day I was suddenly irritated past bearing. I snatched the pipe out of his hands and ran off with it.

Now that pipe was the one precious possession Ned had. In a trice he was after me. 'If you pitch it overboard I'll slit your throat!' he yelled, and I believed him. One of the seamen tried to trip me up as I rushed past, but I dodged him and so came face to face with Thomas Lurting. Without think-

ing what I was doing I dodged again, and so tumbled blindly down on to the main deck, where I ran full tilt into the captain, who was discussing some defect in the rigging with his officers. Ned at first fared rather better, for he was caught and held by Thomas Lurting, but from those restraining arms he now hurled down upon me a string of the foulest language it had ever been my lot to hear.

‘Fifteen lashes for this brawling brat next Monday morning!’ called the captain to Lurting, as one of the lieutenants boxed my ears and kicked me aside. ‘And as for the other, I’ve heard the colour of his language before. Come down and teach him not to swear.’

Ned looked sober enough now. He brushed past me as he was being conducted to the captain. ‘Never mind!’ he muttered, and I tried to say I was sorry, and made a poor job of it. I was too near crying. They took Ned and bound him with his back to the mainmast, and they thrust a marline spike into his mouth and fastened it there with rope. When I saw what had happened I tried to push my way through the crowd of seamen. I was shouting every oath I knew, and wishing I knew as many as Ned. Then Thomas Lurting left the mainmast, and put his hand over my mouth and bore me away.

'They must take me too, they must!' I gasped, as soon as I could get my mouth free.

'Much good that would do him!' commented Lurting dryly. 'You're to go down and take his place with the cook. Your punishment will come soon enough, if that's any comfort.'

'I don't care, curse you, let me go to him!' I cried, struggling, but Lurting merely cuffed me gently and turned me over to a seaman who was standing by, watching us curiously.

'Here, Roger Dennis!' he said, 'take this lad down to the cook before he does any more damage, and tell him to keep him busy. And if you can teach him and that scapegrace friend of his to grow into men of as few words as yourself, it would be as well for them. Now do what you're told, boy, and stay where you're bid, and maybe it will not be long before you see Ned Farrant.'

He looked down at me with one of his queer smiles, and suddenly I trusted him and was reassured. He would see to Ned. I went willingly with Roger Dennis and worked hard for the cook, so hard that he was pleased to say that he would as lief have me to work for him as any boy in the ship, which he would certainly not have said had he known me better. Roger Dennis left me there, and went to seek news of Ned; he soon returned to say that the captain had been pleased to shorten the

punishment from an hour to half an hour, as he considered that I had given overmuch provocation. 'Which I fear will not make thy punishment any lighter,' observed Dennis quietly.

I said I did not mind, and meant it, nor did I when I saw poor Ned with his mouth all sore and bleeding. He was strangely quiet for the next day or so, and we were somewhat depressed altogether, so that I was almost glad when it was my turn to be punished, and I was taken out on the Monday morning to the chest where the boys were whipped. But by the time I came to the end of my fifteen lashes I was beginning to feel a little sore to think that Thomas Lurting was so true to his word. I think he was anxious to avoid even the semblance of favouritism. He was the fairest-minded man I ever knew.

By this time we had joined the rest of the fleet, and were nearing the Canaries, where rumour had it that we were to go into action. I could not sleep that night, by reason of the soreness of my stripes, and so I stole out of the forecastle and crept up on deck, where Ned and Christopher soon joined me. Christopher never slept much, poor lad. We hid in the shadows behind a great coil of rope, and crouched there, looking out to sea. It was that very quiet time before daybreak. The waves were very still.

'How goes it, Richard?' whispered Ned.

'Better,' said I. 'And you, Ned? You know, I told you I was sorry, but I didn't tell you why I was so angry. I didn't mean anybody to know—but——'

'Don't tell us if you'd rather not,' said Ned.

'I'd rather!' I said shortly, and then I told them all my story. 'So you see, Ned, that's why I hated it when you teased me so about Croly Chase and Buckinghamshire and all the rest of it!' I explained 'Because I really am one of those Crolys, and he's my father, and if some of the seamen—you know the ones I mean—learned that about my mother——'

'That's all right!' cut in Ned swiftly. 'I understand, and I'm sorry, and I deserved all I got. And if you want to know how I know anything about the Crolys and Buckinghamshire, well, my father was a cavalier too, so there you are! Only he gave in to the crop-ears, and betrayed a plot the Royalists had to bring the young King into his own, and I was so mad when I heard about it that I ran away to sea to join Prince Rupert—and—here I am.'

The light was growing steadily in the east. Christopher sat up and rested his chin on his hand. 'I never wanted to come to sea,' he said quietly, 'but I came, and here we all are, the three of us. Perhaps it was meant that we should come.'

'How was it?' we asked. We were both lying side by side, full length on the deck, but Christopher was looking out to sea.

'I have a distant relative who will inherit all we have if I die. The estate is entailed—I don't know what that means, do you?—and it isn't much of an estate anyhow, but we were very happy there, Mother and Philippa and I. There's an orchard behind the house—the air smells like the skin of an apple before you take the first bite.'

'I wish I had an apple now!' interrupted Ned.

'So do I!' I agreed. 'But go on, Christopher. Why didn't you stay and eat 'em?'

'Our cousin said he would educate me as his own son, and Mother and Philippa were so proud. He took me to London, and turned me over to a man. He said he was my tutor; but this is where I came.'

'Humph!' said Ned. 'There was once an old philosopher who said there were three sorts of people, the quick, the dead, and those at sea. I suppose so long as you're not one of the first lot, it doesn't matter to him.'

'I shall soon be one of the second lot,' said Christopher quietly. 'Oh, stow it!—I don't mind—only I'm glad we've had this talk. When I first came on board there wasn't a boy but was fresh from prison. Now we know about each other, and

we'll not tell anybody, not even Roger Dennis, though he's the kindest man on board, or even Thomas Luring, though he's the strongest and bravest. What about the men on board who come from your village, Richard?'

'There are only three of them left,' said I, which was true, for one of them was a powerful swimmer and had swum ashore at the last port, and another had been killed in a deck brawl. 'And they're not the kind who would think of blabbing if somebody didn't remind them. Two of 'em aren't Paget Point men, either. Paget Point! I wonder when I'll see it again!'

I happened to glance at Christopher. His thoughts seemed suddenly to be miles away. He had a habit of withdrawing himself like that. His eyes looked bigger than ever, and his brown hair fell aslant across his forehead. He didn't even trouble to push it back. 'Promise me one thing, lad!' he said.

'What is it?'

'When you are back in England, go into Hertfordshire. There's a little village called White May, and our house is beyond the church. You couldn't miss it, though it isn't a big place. Mother and Philippa will be—waiting—and I should like you to tell them I was—happy.'

The dawn was breaking now, and little pink

clouds were crowding up into the sky. A light breeze stole across the sea.

‘You’ll see Hertfordshire long before we do,’ said Ned, ‘and raise up a family of lusty sons to make long noses at your worthy cousin. Call one of ’em after me, and I’ll teach them to do it for you. I doubt if you ever made one in your life. Meanwhile, I’m hungry; let’s——’

A cry came from the look-out: ‘Land ahoy!’ There was a rush below decks as the seamen came tumbling up half awake. Signs of activity appeared on the other ships around us, and a great shout arose from the fleet. For there in the distance, purpling on the horizon, still half-shrouded in morning mist, lay the shore of Santa Cruz.

CHAPTER III

Santa Cruz

OUR grandchildren will know more about the Battle of Santa Cruz than we do. I remember my dear mother used often to laugh when I asked her to repeat some of my grandfather's tales of the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

'Ask young Mr. Harry Greenwood!' she would say. 'He reads books, and those that read books can tell you far more about great events than can those who took part in them.' And then, on my insisting, she would go on: 'He always said that it was thirsty work. And he had a bet on with another man about a certain spotted rat which the other man vowed he had killed, and my father swore had escaped. And in the explosion, when the foremast came down and your grandfather lost his arm in saving young Mr. William, out popped that spotted rat more dead than alive, and your grandfather, in great pain though he was, exclaimed: "What price your spotted rat, my lad? I've won!" And the bet was paid in extra rum, to drown the pain when the surgeon had him. That's all he ever told me, except that he saw a great galley go down with every mother's son aboard, all crying out on heaven in their strange tongue. But

that moved him not so much as a lad they picked up from some wreckage. He was lying as he might have been asleep; Father said he could have wept to look upon him and he so like his own young brother. There was a book in his breast and they knew it for a Testament. Eh! it's a queer world! And my mother would go about her work again and drive me off to play.

Now that I was to be in a great sea fight myself, I knew little save that I was kept running to and fro on everybody's errands, at everybody's beck and call. They say that they waited some time to go into action while our good Admiral Blake prayed to God for guidance, but if it was so I knew nothing of waiting, nor did any of our crew. In good time we were all ready for action, with our guns all run out of their ports, and the garlands in all places well filled with shot. Thomas Lurting seemed to be everywhere at once, now sending down for more shot, and now directing the gunners at their work.

'When the time comes, lads, don't waste your shot!' he commanded. 'Use a linstock if you must, but remember I'll have none of them for myself. Stand to the left of your gun with your right foot on the carriage and a small piece of match in your hand; look over your gun, fire, and leap clear. You'll never miss your mark if you go about it my way.'

We were not in the first squadron, and by the time we neared the bay several of our ships were already anchored about half a gun-shot from the castle. I slipped up into the shrouds to have a good look, and saw the bay spread out before me, with a great castle to protect it as well as several forts and outlying breastworks. Riding at anchor on the calm waters were some sixteen Spanish galleons, all laden with treasure, and with no time to unload it now that we had come so suddenly upon them. A strong hand seized my ankle, and before I looked down I knew that Thomas Lurting had found me.

'I'll see more of you on Monday!' said he, and brought me tumbling down on to the deck.

I picked myself up and rubbed my bruises. 'Sorry, sir!' said I. 'But isn't it a grand sight?'

'Ay, so it is!' he agreed, and put an arm about my shoulders. 'See, yonder's the Spanish Admiral's galleon; I should reckon she carries up to sixty guns. And yonder's the Vice-Admiral. The captain's making for the flagship now, to know what our orders are. I can't see where we're to get in, myself.'

We ran in under our Admiral's stern, to know where our place was, and the answer came back: 'Where you can get in!' So we went astern of all the other ships, and so came very close in to shore,

within half a cable's length of the Vice-Admiral's galleon. He straightway veered away from us, as fast as we veered towards him, until at last we manœuvred across his hawse and so ran out all the guns we could on that side of the ship. A couple of broadsides and it was all over, for some of our shot fell into his powder room, and there was such an explosion as knocked the breath clean out of me for a time, until Roger Dennis saw me and dashed a handful of water over my face from one of the cowls by the guns.

The Spanish Vice-Admiral's galleon being sunk with all hands, the Admiral came up and nearly sent us after him, but we veered round again quickly, and after three broadsides blew up his ship also, the men leaping overboard in the nick of time. Then, under cover of the smoke, we moved away quickly, so that by the time the gunners on the great castle could see us clearly, we were almost out of their range.

There came a lull in the fighting so far as we were concerned, and Ned and I leant over the bulwarks for a moment to get a breath of fresh air. The fumes and smoke were enough to make a man cough his heart out, as poor Christopher knew to his cost, for when he had come on deck to make himself useful, he had coughed so terribly that he had been sent below again to help the sur-

geon. Neither of us cared to think of him there. We knew something of what it would be like.

'Man the long boat!' shouted a voice, and Thomas Lurting raced along the deck followed by a score or so of eager volunteers. Both of us pressed forward and got our ears boxed for our pains, so that we must needs content ourselves with hanging out of the shrouds, to cheer as the boat pushed off. They were making for a great deserted galleon which lay close to the shore, hard by one of the smaller forts.

'Richard, it's not deserted!' exclaimed Ned suddenly. 'Devil take me if I don't see a man yonder!'

It was all too true. Our warning shouts were drowned in a rattle of shot as the gallant remnant of the Spanish crew rose from their hiding-place and fired the guns.

'They're firing over them, Ned!' I cried. 'Thank God! They're too close in to get any damage. God send they get safely back!'

By this time our men had got to work and fired a broadside into the galleon, which blew her up with her scanty crew of brave defenders. The long boat rocked perilously as the men pulled her desperately out of danger. Blinded with smoke, they hung on to their oars while Thomas Lurting cheered them on. Now and again the smoke would

clear, and a hail of shot would 'póur down' upon them from the forts and breastworks on shore. It seemed too unlikely a miracle for them to escape, but escape they did, and were hauled aboard, wanting, half of them more dead than alive. Thomas Lurting strode imperturbably past us, his face streaked with smoke and sweat.

'Idling again, boys?' he barked.

'Thank God you're safe, sir!' we cried, clutching each of us an arm in our excitement.

Thomas Lurting looked down at us, and suddenly bit his lip. That venture into the jaws of death had taken its toll of him after all.

'It was a very great deliverance,' he said, and passed on.

After the smoke had cleared away from the scene of our engagement there came another pause in the fighting. We were busy helping to clear the decks and make ready for action, when we saw Thomas Lurting setting off in the pinnace with Roger Dennis and another seaman called Will Jevons.

'Thomas Lurting!' roared the captain from the poop. 'Where are you going?'

Roger and Will stopped rowing, and Lurting stood up in the pinnace. 'To fire the galleons yonder, sir!' he shouted, and pointed to a part of the shore where a great galleon was lying close in.

with another across her hawse and another across her stern. They all looked deserted.

'Then you're undermanned!' shouted the captain. 'Come back for another five.'

A mad idea seized me. Before Ned could stop me I turned and raced along the deck after the crowd of men who were volunteering for the venture. Elbowing my way through them, I got my leg athwart the gunwale and dropped down, to land half in and half out of the pinnace, just as the last of the five had joined them and they were pushing off. Roger Dennis put out a strong hand and pulled me into the boat, or I would have fallen back into the sea.

'No good to stop and put him aboard again!' he shouted to Lurting, who was frowning disapproval. 'They'll have an eye on our business ashore if we linger.'

'Row on, lads!' ordered Lurting. 'And put your backs into it. And you, Richard, keep a sharp look out for any sign of movement on the galleons or ashore. You'll make yourself useful now you've come, you rascal, or you'll pay doubly dear for it on Monday!'

Crash! I had scarcely settled down to my watch when a gun was fired out of one of our own ports, filling the air with acrid smoke and fumes.

'Stout lads!' cried Lurting. 'That should cover

our passage, God willing! Now[•] then, lads,[•] pull away merrily, hearts alive! Crack all your back-bones and pull, boys, pull!

The boat tore through the water under cover of the smoke. We were nearing the galleons now, and I wondered whether after all we should find them manned. The smoke cleared away, but I could still see no sign of life about.

'All aboard, boys!' cried Lurting, and we tumbled up one after the other, Dennis stopping a moment to make our boat secure. And here my curiosity must needs get me into mischief again. For, finding myself on the deserted galleon, and the men being all busied with preparations for its destruction, I could not resist the temptation to explore. It was not the fore-castle which attracted me. Fore-castles are much the same all the seas over, and no attraction to anybody. But the poop and the captain's quarters—what might I not find there?

I slipped away from the others and climbed the companion ladder. The poop was raised higher than ours, a marvel of intricate carving and gilding. It seemed a pity to destroy it. I penetrated to the captain's cabin and found all manner of wonderful things there. Paintings hung upon the wall, and there were vessels of gold and silver. Books enough lay about the room to have gladdened the



We were nearing the galleons now

heart of Christopher, and a pile of musical instruments lay stacked together carelessly on a pair of virginals. I picked out a small recorder and thrust it into the breast of my shirt. Ned would be glad of it, and perhaps it would make up to him a little for having missed this adventure. On a low table lay a casket of sweetmeats. I drew slowly towards it—somehow, it felt like stealing!—and then suddenly a harsh voice said: 'Fire down below, boys, fire down below!'

I jumped nearly out of my skin and looked wildly round. There was a cackle of wild laughter and a string of Spanish oaths. I snatched up a knife, which lay by the casket and gripped it firmly.

'Be you man or devil, come on!' I shouted. Then I burst out laughing, for there, in a corner of the room, was a great grey parrot in a cage. 'Pretty Poll! Pretty Poll!' she remarked ingratiatingly, and then sidled towards the door of her cage. 'Fire down below, boys, fire down below!' said she, and cocked her head on one side. She looked as if she was sniffing the air. It made me sniff the air too. And there was a smell of burning, only too clear.

I thrust the knife into my belt and snatched up Polly's cage. I couldn't leave her there to roast. Out on to the deck I rushed, to find myself enveloped in clouds of smoke. My companions had

done their work only too well. And of course they had not thought about me; I had no business there in any case. A hot rush of flame swept past me from the rigging. The heat was almost unbearable and the smoke was choking me. Losing my head entirely, I was going to rush back to the cabin again, when I heard a voice calling 'Richard! Richard!' It was a voice I had never yet disobeyed. Something in it made me pull my scattered wits together. With all the strength of my bursting lungs I shouted, 'Here, sir!' and made in the direction of the sound.

'Make for the larboard gunwale!' came the command.

I steadied myself for a desperate run across the deck. The men had regained their boat only to find me missing, and Lurting, whilst refusing to sanction a return into the inferno on the lower deck, was cruising round in the hopes of coming within hail of me. A sudden gust of wind sent the flames leaping from the mainsail to the cross jack; I made a last frantic bid for it, rushed blindly through the smoke, caught at the gunwale, fell back fainting, was pulled over by a strong arm, and so tumbled blindly, still clutching the bird-cage and held firmly in the arms of my rescuer, headlong down into the sea.

Willing hands soon pulled us out. Lurting—

for he it was who had saved me—shook the water from his clothes like a great dog and took his seat at the helm. I crouched at his feet, limp and bedraggled, and still gasping for breath. I would have died for him willingly, I thought. He looked down at me with his slow smile, and then turned to the men.

'Lads,' said he, 'will you hold your peace about it all?'

'Why so?' asked Will Jevons.

'Why? Because it would be a waste of my good breath to pull him out of the fire, and a waste of your good breath to pull him out of the sea, if our good captain sets him swinging at the yard-arm when we get him back. Leave his punishment to me.'

'Ay, ay!' put in Roger Dennis. 'Leave it to Tom Lurting, lads! I'd trust him with most things.'

There was a growl of assent from the other men and that ended the matter, save that one old salt grunted out something about teaching the young pup a lesson.

'Ay, ay, gaffer, I'll see to that!' Lurting assured him, and that was the last I heard of it from the men, or from Thomas Lurting either, save that I got twice the flogging the other boys had on the next Black Monday morning.

Something in Thomas Lurting's look soon told me that our troubles were not yet over. We were still hugging the weather side of the blazing galleon, and with the other galleons burning on either side of us our situation was becoming every moment more precarious. Still Lurting did not order the men to pull away. He was swearing softly under his breath. 'The lads on board have forgotten us!' he muttered.

'We may wait till we're roasted and they'll never fire a gun!' said Will Jevons. 'Let's put off!'

'So be it, lads!' said Lurting. 'But you must pull as if the devil were at your backs!'

The second journey was a very different matter from the first. Instead of being screened by the smoke from our own friendly guns, we were within full sight of the enemy on land, and well within his range.

'Pull, boys, pull!' urged Lurting. 'Break your backbones, start your eyes out, pull like the devil—God save us all, they've got us!'

A roar came from the guns on the breastworks, and a volley of small shot rattled about us. A man at the other end of the boat fell lifeless over his oar; he had been shot through the head.

'Steady, lads, pull away and we'll beat 'em yet!' shouted Lurting. Then he cried out in dismay as

poor Will Jevons dropped his oar and slipped sideways with his hands on his breast. The man next him collapsed too and lay in the bottom of the boat groaning loudly, with a great shot wound torn across his back. But poor Will scarce made a sound. Thomas Lurting caught him in his arms, and in all those troubled waters, with the shouts of the living and the groans of the dying, with the crash of the cannon and the roar of the fire, it seemed as if they two were alone together as they had been walking in Paradise.

'Tom, I'm spent!' whispered Will.

'God bless you, old friend!' groaned Lurting. 'I think you are.'

'Keep that little fellow from the yard-arm—and—remember—you've been a true friend to me—and—oh, Tom!—I'm going home!'

How we regained our ship I never knew. I lay huddled down by Will's dead body, and the men pulled for dear life with the shot whistling round their heads. When we regained the deck Ned was waiting for me, but when he saw the look on my face he stopped asking questions and pulled me out of harm's way.

'You've not been missed, you numskull!' said he. 'Now be sick if you must be sick, and a sicklier looking face I never saw, and then for God's sake get to work before you're found out and

strung up for disobeying orders. 'But—oh, Richard, I thought you'd never come back!'

We hid the parrot in the fore-castle and got back to work. All about us the Spanish galleons were sunk, or burning to the water's edge. The bay was full of wreckage, and drowning men were struggling to reach the shore. It was a ghastly sight, I thought. I had seen enough of death that day. Somehow or other, wherever I looked I could see Will Jevons's face, and above all the roar of shot and the shouts of the seamen I could hear his voice: 'Oh, Tom, I'm going home!' I was growing a little light-headed, what with strain and fatigue, and the searing pain which bit through me wherever the flames had caught me.

Out of the bay we sailed at last, with one last moment of danger when the great castle let fly at us as we passed. Mercifully she harmed us but little, save in our rigging, but Thomas Lurting was up on the clew of the main-tack, and nearly lost his life when a shot cut through the bolt rope a little above his head.

That evening, when all was cleared away, we three friends slipped off together and hid in the bows. We were all dropping with weariness, though Ned was not so far gone but that he must try a tune or two on his new recorder. Christopher was too dejected even to talk poetry. He had been

turned out of the surgeon's quarters in the end, but even so he had seen too much, poor lad.

Thomas Lurting found us there at last. We expected a rating, but he merely sat down on a coil of rope and, pulling me up between his knees, began to put some salve on my burns.

'We pretty well scorched you, son,' said he. 'It was a merciful deliverance.'

'I know, sir!' said I. 'I'm sorry.'

'A merciful deliverance!' he repeated. 'And how often have I been delivered this day? Thank God for it!'

'I don't believe in God any more!' burst out Christopher, half-sobbing. 'When you've seen a living man's leg cut off, you stop believing in God!'

'Still holding me with one arm, Lurting put out his other hand and laid it on Christopher's shoulder. 'Look yonder!' he said.'

The sun was sinking down beneath the waves, and one by one the vessels were crowding like winged birds along the golden pathway of the sunset. A great silence fell upon the waters.

'Isn't the deep a vasty thing?' said Thomas Lurting. 'We think ourselves full venturesome to brave it. And yet when we passed through the Bay of Biscay, far out to sea, I saw a linnnet come and perch upon the rigging as it had been a tree in the woods at home. Are the terrors of the deep so

great when a little bird can fly there unafraid? And are the terrors of life and death so great when even the sparrow falls not to earth without our Heavenly Father?’

‘I can’t understand,’ said Christopher stubbornly.

‘Can the bird?’ asked Thomas Lurting, looking out to sea.

CHAPTER IV

Quaking the Quakers

SOME few months later Thomas Lurting came upon us one day, sprawling on the fore-castle deck with the parrot cage in our midst. Ned, the rascal, was trying to teach it to swear in English. 'For it swears only in Spanish,' he explained gravely, 'and that is very foul language. It should swear in English like a good Christian.'

Thomas Lurting tweaked his ear for him and sat down beside us. He was always fond of birds, and Poll had taken quite a fancy to him. 'Let's have her out, boys!' said he, and unfastened the cage door. None of us ever dared to set her free, for she would bite us and try to escape; but she would sit by the hour on Thomas Lurting's shoulder, and go peacefully back into her cage when he bade her. She perched now on one of his great hands while he caressed her with the other. Those powerful hands of his could be as gentle as a woman's when he touched an animal or a bird, or some poor sick creature.

'There's mischief aboard this ship!' he said suddenly.

'How so?' I asked, rolling over on to my stomach and kicking my heels in the air.

'You remember those soldiers we transported a while back?' he asked.

'Ay,' said we.

'They were a poor lot of fellows, pressed men for the most part, though who am I to look down on a pressed man when I was one myself?'

'You!' I exclaimed. 'You weren't a pressed man?'

'A pressed boy, rather,' said he. 'I was taken at Liverpool when I was a lad of fourteen, and sent to the wars in Ireland. I felt bitterly then.'

'The navy got a good man when it got you, sir!' said Christopher quietly, and I urging let him say it, though Ned or I would have got our ears boxed for our pains. He was always gentle with Christopher. 'But what was the matter with the soldiers? Did they steal something?'

'Left something behind, more likely!' said Lurting. 'There's been trouble growing up ever since. It seems one of them, a half-baked fool of a Scottish lad, had been to a Quakers' meeting before he was pressed, and must needs blab about it to some of our fellows.'

'Stop a bit! What's a Quakers' meeting?' asked Ned.

'How should I know?' retorted Lurting irritably. 'They're some sort of a long-eared, wry-necked sect, I suppose. I doubt if the Scotch

bumpkin knew either, except that they'll not doff their hats to their betters, or go to public worship.'

'Not go to public worship?' exclaimed Ned. 'Then there is some sense about them after all! I don't know which is the worst, when the chaplain preaches or when the captain does. Lord knows why I should stow away on a ship with a Baptist preacher for captain! I wouldn't go near either of 'em if it wasn't for you catching us!'

'And whipping us!' I put in ruefully. 'I don't know why you must needs notice every time we miss.'

'I'll have no young heathens aboard this ship!' said Lurting. 'And no Quakers either, if I'm to carry out the captain's orders.'

'Who's a Quaker?' asked I in astonishment, and 'Good Lord! Who's a Quaker?' laughed Ned.

'The two fellows the Scottish foute conversed with,' explained Lurting. 'At least, we call them Quakers, though it seems they know little of it, thank heaven! But they call all men equal in the sight of God, and meet together in silence instead of sitting under the chaplain. There they sit gawking at each other, as dumb as a couple of bag puddings. And the worst of it is, they've four others along with them now, and Roger Dennis is one of them.'

'Roger Dennis!' I exclaimed, and instinctively

I put my hand on his knee and looked up into his face. For he might flog men mercilessly for refusing to attend the service, but Roger Dennis was his friend.

He brought down his hand on mine with such violence that I cried out with the pain of it, and Polly rose in a flutter. 'I never struck him!' he vowed. 'God be my witness, I've never touched him!'

I slipped my hand into my armpit and nursed it there, while Polly settled down again as before. 'Fire down below, boys, fire down below!' she observed, with her head on one side.

Lurting had ceased to pay any attention to her, or to us. He was looking straight before him with a puzzled frown. 'He has a check upon me,' he muttered. 'He says not a word, but he has a check upon me. I have beaten them and kicked them aside scores of times, but now that he is one of them—as God loves me, I dare not! And there isn't one of them strikes back, or even curses. What can a man do with fellows who never strike back? Would the captain have me flay them alive?'

'Why not laugh at 'em?' suggested Ned. 'If Richard and I get a sight of them numping and moping, we'll soon cure them!'

'Try it!' said Lurting briefly, and he put Polly

back into her cage with a sigh. 'And you, Christopher?'

Christopher shook his head. 'Why don't you talk it over with Roger Dennis?' he asked.

We had all risen by now. Thomas Lurting put his hands on Christopher's shoulders. He was swaying to and fro like a reed. 'I dare not, you little fool, I dare not!' he said, and thrusting the boy aside, went on his way.

Christopher looked after him anxiously. Dear lad! He was always quick to feel for other folk. 'He's unhappy!' he said softly.

'So he is!' vowed Ned. 'Let me meet some of those blessed Quakers and I'll soon quake 'em!'

'So'll I!' I agreed. 'Roger Dennis or no Roger Dennis!' But I could not help remembering that Roger Dennis had been good to me that day at Santa Cruz.

We had great fun, quaking the Quakers. At least, it was great fun at first. We used to find out where they were meeting, and then walk amongst them on our hands, or turn somersaults under their noses. The trouble was, they never seemed to see us. There were six of them, and they sat on as quietly as if we had never been there. Not a word passed between them. Ned had the best ideas—Christopher, of course, would never join in. It wasn't his game, somehow. Ned would steal

a lemon from the cook and suck it, or an onion and cut it to windward of them. We used to set Polly's cage just behind them, and tweak her tail till she let off a volley of her choicest Spanish oaths.

One day we brought a pail of filthy, stinking water to throw over them. A big, skulking seaman called Jake saw us and joined us. His language was even filthier than the water. He caught up the bucket, and then suddenly Roger Dennis glanced up. Something in his look went right through me. Ned felt it too. We both snatched at the pail just as Jake was going to throw it, and our combined onslaught nearly overbalanced him. Then a big wave caught us amidships, and the vessel gave a great lurch which sent us rolling into the scuppers, Jake, bucket and all. Jake drew his knife and I felt a sharp pain in my arm. 'Push his eyes in, Ned!' I screamed, but at that moment there was a clatter of sea boots and Lurting was amongst us, kicking us apart. By the time he had us in front of him we were all of us pretty sore and crestfallen, and Jake looked murderous.

'Did he get you, Richard?' asked Lurting, after he had confiscated the knife.

I had thrust my tell-tale arm behind me. I was scared stiff of Jake. 'There's nothing amiss, sir!' I said hastily. 'And it was our fault to begin with.

We were making game of the Quakers. And—we're sorry—and—please may we go now?'

'Jake drew his knife on the lad,' put in Roger Dennis quietly. He was not afraid of Jake, it seemed.

Lurting put out his hand and caught me by the arm. My shirt sleeve was dripping with blood. Coolly he tore it apart and looked at the wound. 'Humph! You've got off lightly enough!' he said.

'Don't send me to the surgeon, sir!' I pleaded. 'Then captain needn't know. And don't get Jake into trouble!'

Lurting looked at the little group which had gathered around. 'Be off with you, lads!' said he. 'Haven't you enough to do as it is, with a squall coming up. Take your knife, Jake, and use it on your meat in future. Roger, get to work with your friends; you've caused enough trouble for one day. And you, boys, come down to my cabin and get what's coming to you.'

Lurting did not spare salt water when he washed my cut and bound it up with clean linen. 'The surgeon couldn't do it better,' he grinned. 'He'd have your arm off for less.'

'Aren't you going to punish us?' asked Ned.

'No! Why should I? I set you on to it!' he replied.

There was a tap on the door and Christopher

thrust his head in. 'You're wanted on deck, sir,' he cried. 'There's a storm coming up fit to blow a man down!'

'God knows it is!' said Thomas Lurting. 'Get to work, lads, and let's have no more mischief, unless you want the cat-o'-nine-tails round your ears!'

He strode up on deck and we tumbled after him. There was indeed a storm blowing up. A ghastly, livid hue overspread the sky, and the ship staggered pitifully in the trough of the mighty billows. For the rest of that day and all that night there was little rest to be had for man or boy. The seaman toiled unceasingly at the pumps, whilst the decks were all awash with water from the great waves which bore down upon us. Before we had had time to clear the quarter-deck, the hen coops were swept overboard with all their squawking occupants. 'There goes the captain's breakfast!' laughed Ned, whilst I secretly congratulated myself that poor Polly was safe in the forecastle. The Paget Point man, Charlie Harringay, was swept clean off the crojack yard by a huge wave, and was only saved from drowning by Roger Dennis, who made a frantic grab at him which cost him the use of his arm for many weeks afterwards. Another poor fellow had his head crushed in like an egg-shell when one of the booms came crashing down. Lurting saw it coming and kicked me out of

harm's way in the nick of time, shouting to George to get clear as he did so. Life and Death were near neighbours on the frigate that night.

Next morning the worst was over, and we all set to work to repair the damage. It was a wearisome day for us, for we were all worn out with the storm. The wind had died down, but a heavy sea was still running, and the ship herself seemed tired as she shuddered in the trough of the waves. That afternoon we committed poor George's body to the deep. Lurting's face was working strangely as he watched that pitiful sight. Long after the others had dispersed he stood on the swaying deck, looking out to sea. The clouds had cleared, and over the pale horizon a golden light shone serenely as the day drew near its close.

Christopher had gone below with the chaplain, but after a while he came up again, and stood silently by Thomas Lurting. Ned and I watched at a distance; we dared not go so near. After a while, Christopher put out his hand and touched his arm. 'Roger Dennis was coming along the deck. Lurting looked down at Christopher, and something passed between them which had no need of words. Christopher stepped back,

'Roger!' said Thomas Lurting.

'Ay, Thomas?' said Roger Dennis.

'I would speak with you!'

'I will go with you.'

That was all they said. Every word was graven on my memory. Then they went down into Lurting's cabin together, and shut fast the door. And we three boys hung about together disconsolately because we were not wanted there.

That week Ned and I had the biggest fight of our lives. We had been bickering off and on for a day or so, because we were still tired out with the storm and want of sleep, and we lacked Thomas Lurting to knock our heads together. He had been unwell of late, and now spent much of his time below. I was especially irritable, partly because I missed him more, and partly because the cut on my left arm was still a little sore, being yet unhealed.

That day I met Ned on deck as I was coming up from Thomas Lurting's cabin. I did not want him to know I had been there. I had only slipped down to see if I was wanted, and had met with no response. I brushed past Ned, as if I was on my way to do some errand.

'I know where you've been!' he grinned. He had an apple in his hand, and as he spoke he took a big bite out of it, his eyes laughing across at me the while. 'You've been down to see if he wants you and he doesn't! Poor little Richard's lost his nurse!'

'Dry up, fathead!' I said. 'And leave me alone. I'm busy.'

'Now, now, naughty temper! It doesn't want me, it wants its nurse. Cry, baby, cry! Nursie's gone and left it in the lurch!'

I clenched my right fist. 'If you don't shut up I'll push your face in!' I threatened.

Ned stood ostentatiously aside to let me pass. 'All right, have it your own way! But you've been left in the lurch, all right. Thomas Lurting's joined the Quakers.'

'He hasn't!'

'He has!'

'You're a liar!'

'You're another!'

We flew at each other like wild cats. Over and over the deck we rolled, clutching at each other's throats, blacking each other's eyes, punching each other's noses. The wound on my left arm burst open and bled profusely over us both. 'First Jake came up, and then Charlie Haringay, and both tried to kick us apart, but though our ribs were black and blue, it only made us fight the more.

'You're a liar!'

'You're another!'

'I hate you!'

'I hate you!'

'Break their necks if you must, but part them!'

snapped a voice above us, and Jake and Charlie redoubled their efforts. Plucked apart, ~~w~~^{we} struggled vainly with our captors and yelled defiance at each other. Then suddenly we realized that it was the captain himself who had given the command. He and the chaplain were standing together, looking at us.

'Well, what was it all about, boys?' demanded the captain.

The same thought struck us both. We could not split on Lurting. Sullenly we hung our heads. 'Nothing, sir,' we replied.

'Nothing? Nothing? Two boys murdering each other on my ship for nothing? There's more in it than that, my lads, and you know it. Out with it!'

'No!' said I desperately, and 'No!' echoed Ned.

'Then there *is* something, sir! They've admitted it!' triumphed the chaplain.

'Where's the boatswain's mate?' snapped the captain.

'Sick in his cabin, sir,' said Jake. 'Shall I call him, sir?'

'No! I'll have the truth out of these lads and I'll have it at once. String them up and flog it out of them!'

Ned began to go wild at this. 'You can flog the hide off me and I'll still say it was nothing!' he

shrieked. I said no more; my captor happened to be Jake, so I knew what was coming to me.

It was a long time before they gave it up. Christopher said they threw bucket after bucket of salt water over me, to try to bring me round for yet another dose of it. Jake did not believe in wasting such a good opportunity. Christopher was most appallingly sick, poor lad, but he stuck to us till we were in the surgeon's hands, and the surgeon, who had always had a soft spot in his heart for him, did his best for us. We were tough specimens both of us; it was well for us that we were.

'Let me fetch Thomas Lurting!' he whispered to us over and over again that night, as he sat up ministering to our needs, and over and over again we told him, not on his life. We would not have told even Thomas Lurting the truth.

The next morning was Sunday, and though we could scarcely stand we were ordered to public worship. Apart from my soreness I was very faint from loss of blood, and my head swam dizzily as I staggered up into the fresh air. As I took my place with the others, I looked round for Thomas Lurting, but could not see him anywhere. He must be very ill, I thought. I began to fret because I had not sent Christopher to him.

The captain was in the middle of one of his endless sermons, when I heard two seamen whispering

behind me. 'Slip away when no one looks, and I'll show you the funniest sight you've seen for a twelvemonth!'

'What's that, mate?'

'Thomas Lurting sitting amongst the Quakers!'

I heard them shuffle away. What had they said? Thomas Lurting amongst the Quakers? Thomas Lurting to be found missing by the officers from his accustomed place, and consorting with that handful of seamen who were defying the law? Thomas Lurting, who had thrashed so many men and boys for non-attendance, to be found ~~himself~~ amongst the delinquents? I could bear it no longer. Nobody was looking at me. No one would miss me. I knew the dingy part of the forecastle where they were accustomed to meet, and I slipped away, limping along as best I could, and clutching hold of anything that would help me on my way. I had some dim idea that I could warn him that his absence had been discovered.

The seamen were there long before me, but I pushed through them and, in their surprise, they made way for me. The ship was pitching lightly, but in my dizziness she seemed to be standing first on one end and then on the other. Slowly I stumbled forward. They were sitting in a little group, and not one of them spoke a word. Thomas Lurting was in the midst of them and his strong

face was at peace. The wind and the waves and the noises of the deck seemed very far away. I came nearer, and still there was no sound. It was more than silence. Even my jangled nerves were stilled.

Suddenly I heard an uproar in the distance, jeers and laughter, and the sound of rushing feet. I knew at once what had happened, and I knew what I must do. Every man in the ship from the captain downwards might come and scoff, but there was only one right place for me to be in. I took a deep breath and staggered forward, to sink down, half-conscious, half-fainting, but undeniably and unutterably at peace, by the side of Thomas Lurting.

CHAPTER V

Castle in Spain

I WAS very ill for some time after that first Quaker meeting. So far as the captain was concerned, I might well have died and been hove overboard in a bit of sacking, but Thomas Lurting and Roger Dennis and their friends looked after me, and their efforts pulled me through. My arm inflamed and became so painful that in my light-headed ravings I begged them to cut it off and throw it into the sea, and the surgeon came along with his instruments all ready to oblige me, but Thomas Lurting would have none of it. They must have been as patient as women in their tending of me, for I grew so violent at times that Ned and Christopher could do nothing with me. Of course I must need blab all about our quarrel, squeaking it out for the whole fore-castle to hear. Lurting took Ned aside and got the whole story out of him then. 'But why—why—?' he muttered, when Ned got to the flogging.

Ned took to stammering. 'We didn't—we couldn't—we didn't know but what there might be trouble for you in it, sir!'

'So you let them flog you senseless, just in case—?' Lurting flushed very red. He was whittling

away at a bit of wood with his knife, and he suddenly ga^hhed it violently and ruined the carving. Pocketing his knife, he slipped a hand under Ned's chin and tilted his face up. 'You and Richard!' he said. 'Do you know Richard nearly died?'

'Yes,' muttered N^oed, and I think I can see him for the dear old scamp he was, all embarrassed under Lurting's scrutiny and shifting from one foot to the other. 'Still, he ain't dead, is he?'

'No, he isn't, but that's not the captain's fault!' said Lurting. 'However, you'll both live to play many another prank, God willing! But lads, lads! If I é^ver forget—God forgive me!'

H^e thrust Ned aside and strode off along the deck. Ned scampered off to relieve his feelings by plaguing the cook, and soon had a frying-pan about his ears. He was a rare lad, was Ned.

It was surprising how soon the row about the Quakers died down. Now that Thomas Lurting had joined them it was a very different matter. He was always a martinet when there was any work to be done, and he soon saw to it that they were the most effective men in the ship. The captain quickly changed his tune, and it was 'Thomas, take your friends and do so and so!' whenever there was any difficult job on hand.

They were a fine set of fellows. By the time I had recovered from my long illness, Christopher

had joined them, with several of the older men. I began to go to their meetings then. I was not born to it, like Christopher, but after that first Sunday morning, when, more dead than alive, I had taken my place by Thomas Lurting's side, it somehow seemed to be the obvious thing to do. Christopher used to sit there looking as if he were in heaven, and I would fidget and feel round in my pockets for a bit of twine to play with, or look out to sea and wish we might land in a school of porpoises. Then something would set me thinking of home, and I would wonder what Mother was doing, and whether she had been baking lately. She was still pretty, was my mother, with very soft blue eyes, and brown curls that were always slipping from under her cap. She had a favourite saying: 'Well, well, it will all come out for good if we wait patiently!' She said that even about my Uncle Matthew. She was never afraid of my Uncle Matthew, as I was. I would begin to wonder why she wasn't. Why weren't people afraid of things? It did not matter how much I pretended, I was really afraid sometimes, deep down inside. Even now I felt sick when I remembered the feeling of being tied up, helpless, at the mercy of Jake. I would have died rather than show fear, but it was there all the same. I had never even suspected my mother of fear, or Roger Dennis. or

Thomas Lurting, except perhaps when he was first tempted to throw in his lot with the Quakers. It was as if they had something inside them which left no place for fear. Perhaps that was what people meant when they talked about God. I would wonder, and the deck would seem very quiet, and the breeze would strike lightly against our faces as we sat. Thomas Lurting would reach across and shake Róger Dennis by the hand, and suddenly the meeting would be over, and the ship would be full of noise and bustle again, with the waves slapping against her sides. Christopher would heave away, still dreaming, and I would shake myself and think the time had not passed half so slowly as I had expected.

It was not long before our hands were fuller than ever, for a great plague broke out on board, and the men died like flies. Christopher went down with it, and we gave him up for lost, for the poor lad wasted to a shadow and looked sick unto death. I believe he would have died in the first day or so had it not been for Thomas Lurting; he had so little will to live that it seemed only the other's more powerful will that kept him alive. What finally cured him was the fact that Thomas Lurting took it from him. Christopher, thin as a lath, pulled himself together and nursed him night and day. Ned and I were of little use, as

it happened, for we both took it, though only slightly.

By the time we were all recovered the plague was nearly over, but it had swept across our ship like the Angel of Death. All the Quakers had had it, though none of them had died; I think it was the nursing which saved them, for this idea of theirs about there being something of God in every man made them very careful of one another. Many of the other poor fellows had begged to be nursed by them: 'Carry me to the Quakers!' they would moan, 'for they take great care of ~~one~~ another, and they will take some care of me.' We did what we could, but there were over forty deaths, all in a short space of time. When it was over there seemed to be a strange sort of bond between those of us who were left, as if we had been through the valley of the shadow.

We were soon fully manned again, and concerned in many a desperate venture. In all the fighting that followed the Quakers were in the thick of it, fearless and careless of their lives. The captain would grin sometimes when he saw them returning from a landing expedition, all begrimed with sweat and powder. 'I care not if all my men turn Quaker!' said he. 'They're the handiest men in my ship.'

One new tradition grew up which pleased the

other seamen well. No Quaker would touch a share of the plunder. None of them could explain exactly why. I once asked Thomas Lurting and he shook his head. 'You know the calm that comes before a storm, lad?' said he.

'Ay, sir!' said I.

'Well, that is where we are now,' said he. 'There's foul weather coming up somewhere, but from which quarter I can't say.'

'I don't care for myself,' I said. 'It's when I see Jake feathering his beastly nest!'

'So you think I might gather a bit of dirt for mine, do you?' rejoined Lurting, and I said no more, for he was in a dangerous mood.

Very shortly after that, when we were lying outside Leghorn, there was serious trouble amongst the crew over this same question of plunder. Jake had claimed more than his fair share in the last distribution, and the next day he and Charlie Haringay had words about it. I never trusted Jake so far, and when I saw him feeling for his knife I knew what was coming.

'Fetch Thomas Lurting, Christopher, you ass!' I shouted, and plunged into the thick of it just as Jake made his first spring at Charlie. I managed to catch his right arm and just broke his aim, so that Charlie had had time to get on his guard by the time Jake had kicked himself free of me. I

rolled head over heels on deck, jumped up and made another dash for it, only to find myself in the middle of as promising a brawl as ever I had been in. Half the seamen lounging round had grievances, and all were spoiling for a fight. I found Jake and Charlie at each other's throats and hung on grimly, hoping to harass the enemy in the rear, and getting well kicked for my pains, with a cut across my forehead into the bargain.

Suddenly there was a shout, and Lurting was in the thick of it. 'Avast there!' he roared. 'Fall away there!'

Most of them obeyed and stood sheepishly to one side; there was something about him nowadays that more than ever commanded men's obedience. Jake and Charlie were still locked together, with me hanging on for dear life. He plucked me off as if I had been a feather, and threw me across the deck to Roger Dennis. Charlie made one last desperate bid for freedom and half broke away. In a trice Jake's murderous knife was at his back, but before he could strike down, Thomas Lurting had his wrist in an iron grip. The knife clattered down on to the deck. Jake made a dive for it, but Lurting caught him by the back of the neck, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. The great bully, helpless as a baby in his hands, suddenly went limp and ceased struggling. Lurting flung him

from him contemptuously just as the captain came on the scene.

'What's the trouble?' snapped the captain.

'There is none now, sir!' said Lurting quietly, though he still panted somewhat after the effort he had made. Jake's great carcass was no light weight.

'Well then, punish where punishment is due,' said the captain, and he did not forget to single me out, as he looked around the group. 'And then set all to work and make ready. We've orders to make sail at once for Barcelona, against a Spanish man-o'-war.'

I was glad we were going into action again. Lurting sent me down to the surgeon to have my cut plastered up, and then told me to come to his cabin. When I got there he seemed in a curiously uncommunicative mood. 'This plunder,' said he slowly, 'it turns the men into devils.'

'So it does!' I agreed cheerfully, thinking of Jake. 'But some of them wouldn't fight without it, would they?'

'Would you?' he asked abruptly.

'Oh yes, but then I don't get much in any case. It's fellows like Jake who do well out of fighting.'

'Go back and get on with your work!' he commanded. 'And keep out of deck brawls in future, or you'll break your neck in spite of me!' He

tweaked my ear as I passed, and I knew he was not really angry. He had queer moods these days.

I ran back on deck and found Christopher. 'That's all right!' I said in answer to his look. 'I didn't get a beating.'

'I never thought you would,' said he. 'Thomas Lurting is never anything but fair. But if you don't look out you'll get killed in one of these deck fights. Why couldn't you keep out of it?'

'Charlie would have been knifed if I had!' I replied. 'And I don't mind Charlie, and I hate Jake.'

'What about all men having the seed of God in their hearts?' asked Christopher.

'Oh, that's all very well, but what about the Spaniards?' I mocked.

'Well, what about them?' persisted Christopher.

'Oh, dry up!' I said. 'Aren't you glad we're going into action? I hate it when we're just hanging about and getting ourselves into trouble.'

'I wonder what sort of folk the Spaniards are?' said Christopher.

'Bad eggs, of course!' said I. 'Or else we shouldn't be fighting them. What's the matter Christopher? You've been mooning round of and on this long while.'

'I know I have,' said Christopher, and he rested his elbows on the gunwale and cupped his chin in his hands. 'It seems a waste of time somehow.'

'What does?'

'Everything! I don't love going into action as you do. I loathe it. You know I'm sick every time I see an arm or a leg cut off, or a head go whizzing through the air. Ugh! "And I don't think it's all glorious; I think it's beastly. And I don't hate the Spaniards, or the Dutch either, for that matter. I don't believe you and Ned do really. But you're cut out for adventures, and I suppose I'm not. I shall get the breath knocked out of me one of these days, and what use will it all have been?'

I flung an arm round his shoulders and swore at him softly under my breath. Somehow it relieved my feelings. 'You!' I said. 'You! You stood by me all the time Jake was flogging me, just to let a fellow feel he'd got a friend! You dressed that arm of mine when it made you sick every time you looked at it! You went with the Quakers when they were the laughing-stock of the fore-castle. If any one's got pluck on board this ship, it's you!'

He looked round at me. 'Do you really think so?' he asked.

'Yes, I do!' I vowed. 'And what's more—Ned and I—we tease the life out of you, you old idiot—but we couldn't do without you—and if you dare talk any more about having the breath knocked out of the plaguy old body of yours, I'll push your face in, see?'

Christopher laughed. 'You've been good friends,' he said simply. 'You don't know what it was like before you came. Come on, let's get to work.'

I shook him gently. 'Well, don't let's have any more of this cursed nonsense of yours about being afraid of going into action!'

'I'm not afraid of *that*!' said Christopher quietly. 'I'm not afraid of being killed—it's *killing* that scares me. Doesn't it you?'

'I never think about it!' said I. 'And anyhow, you'd never have to. You're always in the background, poor lad!'

'Do you remember Thomas Lurting telling us about the linnet?' asked Christopher. 'I killed a linnet once with a stone. I wonder if God saw it fall. I didn't mean to do it. But we *do* mean to kill the Spaniards. I suppose some of them will be boys like us!'

'Christopher, get on with your work!' said a deep voice. Thomas Lurting was standing behind us; his face was working curiously. Christopher ran off obediently. Then Lurting turned to me in a sudden blaze of fury and struck me harshly. 'Get back to work, you lazy young rascal!' he thundered, 'or I'll have you ducked at the yard-arm!' I didn't mind somehow. He looked like a man in hell.

We were soon in action, though not actually against the Spanish fleet. Our part of the day's work was to silence the guns of a great castle on shore, and we set to it with a will. It was a fine castle with huge ramparts and a maze of fortifications. It reminded me of the castles we fisher boys used to build on the shore at Paget Point, and then take turns in breaking them down. It was a great game. And this seemed to me a great game too, with just such a salt smack on the wind as there had been at home, and just such a rocky shore.

They were good gunners in the castle. We had scarcely come within range before they fired on us, and did considerable damage to our rigging. Charlie was up on deck and had his head knocked off, poor fellow. I saw it happen. I began to feel mad after that. And then Ned came running towards me with his face as white as a sheet. 'Christopher!' he gasped out. 'Christopher!' He pointed to a little knot of seamen standing strangely quiet in the turmoil. They were bending over something.

He was lying flat on the deck and he was fully conscious. He looked up at me with an expression of mild surprise. 'It doesn't hurt, Richard!' he said.

Ned and I knelt on either side of him. We could not either of us speak. There came another rattle

of shot, and the men shouted for Thomas Lurting to come and level the guns. He rose up from his place at Christopher's head, and his face was as if it had been carved out of stone.

'Thomas!' whispered Christopher.

He knelt down again and bent forward to catch that faint shadow of a sound.

'Thomas!—Even—the—linnet——'

With a little sigh and a smile on his lips, Christopher died.

CHAPTER VI

The Fight of His Life

THOMAS LURTING went back to his guns with the face of one who was about to do murder. None of the men dared speak to him. I followed him at a little distance, scarcely knowing what I did. I had left Ned with Christopher.

He strode into the forecastle and levelled the guns. His aim was exactly on that part of the castle whence the attack on our ship had come. He came out again upon deck to see how the shot was lighting, and I clutched at his arm. 'Kill every mother's son of them, sir!' I sobbed, breaking down at last. 'Kill every mother's son!' And I seemed to hear Christopher's voice again saying: 'Some of them will be boys like us!'

Lurting stood still as if he had been shot. I could almost have sworn that he had heard it too. Then suddenly he began to tremble. I have never seen a strong man tremble as he did then. He put a hand up to his throat as if he were choking, and then tried to speak, but no sound came.

'Mr. Lurting!' I whispered, terrified. 'What is it?'

'The linnet! My God! The linnet!' he muttered. 'Richard, fetch my clothes!'

I hardly liked to leave him there. He was swaying to and fro on his feet like a drunken man, and all around him men were rushing to and fro in the tide of battle, and shot was hailing down like rain.

'Go, Richard!' he gasped

I fled down to his cabin to bring up his clothes, for he was stripped for fighting. When I returned he was still there, and his face was ghastly. It was as if he neither heard nor saw. I helped him on with his coat and hailed Roger Dennis, who came running up in alarm.

'Is he wounded?' he asked. 'Thomas, man, show me!'

Lurting laid a hand on his shoulder, and it shook like a leaf. 'When all's done, come to my cabin, Roger,' said he. 'And bring a friend with you. I'm down, lad, I'm down!'

'Take him below, Richard!' said Roger. 'I'll see that you're not missed. But get him below as soon as you can, son. He's ill.'

The action was soon over. Lurting sat immovable in his cabin, with his head resting on his hands. I brought him a drink and begged him to take it, but he took no heed of me. So I curled up at his feet and fretted for Christopher, and wished I might watch over his body with Ned. I could see his face so clearly in my mind, with the

high, white brow and the lank, brown hair falling across it just as it always did.

Roger Dennis came down at last with a young fellow called Stephen Whalen, and I brought them drinks and then hung around, in case I might be wanted. I heard Lurting's voice saying steadily: 'The lad said, some of them will be boys like us. And it has lain on my heart ever since. And if you tell me that all men are equal in the sight of God because all men have his seed in their hearts, then to slay those men is sacrilege, have it how you will.'

Roger Dennis nodded thoughtfully, and Stephen Whalen said: 'Once let me be safe at home and I'll take no more part in warfare.'

'Nor I either!' said Roger.

Lurting brought his strong fist down upon his knee. 'If—if—if!' he cried. 'If this is true that has come upon me, as I am an honest man, then if we go into action to-morrow I must bear testimony against it, God helping me!'

They sat in silence then awhile, and even I, boy though I was, could not have broken that silence. It was as if Jacob were pitting his strength against the angel there.

Next morning we committed Christopher to the deep. Ned and I watched over him all that night, and it was with heavy hearts that we saw him go. Not a man aboard but grieved for him. Even the

chaplain had been fond of him. The Quakers met together afterwards, and Ned came somewhat shamefacedly and sat with us. Lurting, hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, suddenly broke upon the stillness. 'I am the resurrection and the life,' said he. 'He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'

He said no more. There was no need for anybody to say any more. Somehow, in that silence, with God's free wind blowing about us, even the youngest of us knew that Christopher lived still.

A week or so afterwards, Stephen Whalen went to the captain and begged to be discharged.

'Why, in hell's name?' asked the captain.

'Because I can fight no longer. I am sorry, sir, to put you about, but I have been thinking——'

'Then stop thinking!' spluttered the captain furiously. 'He that denies to fight in time of engagement, I will put my sword in his guts!'

Stephen Whalen started at this, but faced him squarely. 'Then you'll be but a murderer, sir,' he said coolly, 'and guilty of shedding innocent blood.'

The captain raised his cane and brought it down heavily on the man's shoulders, afterwards thrashing him severely with his own hands. There was not much of the preacher about him that day.

All those weeks I knew my friends were in danger. We were a long time without going into action, and numbers of odd rumours were flying round amongst the men. Thomas Lurting, Roger Dennis, and Stephen Whalen had not spoken one word more. They were biding their time, it seemed. Only there was a suppressed undercurrent of excitement about Thomas Lurting which made me skip round doubly quickly to obey orders. He was not an easy master those days, and I bore the brunt of it. Nobody could have accused him of favouritism!

One day I came upon Jake in the fore-castle, sharpening his knife. 'Pretty, ain't it?' he said, as I passed.

I loathed the man and tried to run past him, but he put out his foot and tripped me up. 'Sharp, ain't it?' said he, as I scrambled to my feet.

'I ought to know that!' I retorted, fingering the half-healed cut on my forehead.

'Let's see!' he growled, and pulled me towards him. I came unwillingly enough. 'Hm!—a very pretty cut—a very pretty cut—but you'll get more than that next time, my young cock-sparrow! You, wait and see!'

He drew the knife slowly across my throat, leaving the thinnest of red lines, as he did so. It was indeed a very sharp knife. My blood ran cold,

but I did not move. At the back of my mind, I had a vague idea that there might be something to be gained by pumping Jake. He was just a little drunk. I pulled myself together and risked taunting him.

'You'll never slit my throat, Jake!' I grinned. 'You wouldn't dare!'

'Wouldn't dare!' I feared for a moment I had gone too far, for his knife was at my throat again. 'Wouldn't dare? There's more than I will dare! But I'll pick you out for my choice morsel, after I've finished with that fancy boatswain's mate of yours!'

'Finished with Thomas Lurting?' I mocked. 'The captain will have you dangling from the yard-arm long before you've finished with Thomas Lurting, and mighty ugly you'll look!'

'Come here, brat!' He took me by the collar and dragged me along. I made a feint of resistance, but in reality went with him willingly enough. I must get to the bottom of all this. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Ned rushing to the rescue; I gave him a mighty wink. He stopped in his tracks and then hung about in the offing, watching us warily. The dear lad was taking no risks. Jake brought me up short before the printed orders of the ship and held me there.

'Can you read?' he asked.

'Yes, if you don't rub my nose on it!' I replied.

He pulled me away a little and pointed to a sentence with his great dirty forefinger. 'Then read that!' he commanded, and pricked my ribs with his knife to hurry me on.

I read it as he bade me, and my heart dropped as I read. 'If any man flinch from his Quarters in Time of Engagement, any may kill him.'

'D'you understand?' roared Jake.

'Well?' I said coolly, trying to infuriate him so far as I dared.

'Any may kill him! Jake may kill him! Jake can whip out his knife and stick it in Thomas Lurting's guts, and be thanked for it! And Jake can slit your little scrawny throat for you like a weasel's, and heave your dirty little carcass into the sea! Now d'you understand?'

He stuck his great face down close to mine, and shook his fist in my eyes. 'I understand you're a filthy liar!' I cried, 'and not fit to lick Thomas Lurting's boots!'

Those would have been my last words on earth had it not been for Ned. Darting in with dexterity born of long practice, he jostled against Jake just as he was striking, and at the same time pulled me clear.

'Run!' he yelled, and we took to our heels in different directions, to meet instinctively outside

Thomas Lurting's cabin. There I poured out my whole story in frantic warning.

'Thanks, lad!' said he, drawing me nearer to him and looking at the red mark on my throat. 'You shouldn't have risked it!'

'But what are you going to do, sir?' we asked.

'I—don't—know!' he said slowly.

'But you must know!' I cried. 'Your life's in danger. You must know what you are going to do!'

He shook his head. He looked a good deal happier than he had done of late. 'Somehow or other,' said he, 'I've a feeling that I shall know what to do when the time comes. Till then—we're in God's hands, boys.'

So we went on much the same as before, except that I noticed Thomas Lurting keeping a wary eye over me. Ned told me afterwards that he bade him stick to me as much as he could, and to see to it that I never loitered about in unfrequented places. He evidently doubted whether Jake would have the strength to resist the temptation to make use of a good opportunity, even before the time came.

The time came at last, as all times come. We received orders at Leghorn to go cruising, and one morning shortly afterwards we saw a great ship bearing down upon us, and the word flew round that she was a Spanish man-o'-war. Then was the

time to clear for action, to run out the guns and fill the garlands with shot, to set the tubs of cartridges and wads and the cowns of water ready. The men were in an uproar, stripping for action and making all shipshape. I found Lurting on deck and clung to him like a leech; I might at least be able to warn him of danger. Suddenly he smiled down at me, quite in his old way.

‘Richard!’ he said, ‘call a meeting.’

‘A meeting!’ I cried. ‘Why, bless me, sir, you’ll not be able to hear yourselves think!’

He nodded. ‘Is it not strange?’ he said. ‘But I know that that is what I must do.’

‘What if they don’t come?’ I asked doubtfully.

‘Then I am clear,’ he replied. ‘I must go my own way alone.’

He went down to Roger Dennis and Stephen Whalen, and Whalen’s young brother, John; I whipped round all the rest. In a very short time we had all met together at our old meeting-place. Ned came too. He threw down his work and followed us.

‘God bless you all, stout lads!’ said Lurting. ‘You know that what the Scottish boy told you was true. But we all know it isn’t the whole truth. He told you that the Seed of God was in the hearts of all men. The next step has come to me, and to Roger and Stephen here; if that is so, then

to slay a man is sacrilege. You cannot worship the Light of God and then break the lantern. Where this will lead us all, God knows! Yet I have such faith in Him that I will trust in His deliverance, even unto death.

'Now, hearkye, lads. I lay no command upon you. No man can stand on another's conscience. Only, think on these things. In a little while you will be sent to your quarters. If you obey, then you stand in with them; if you refuse, then you stand in with me. But remember, the captain has shown much trust in us, and I'll not betray that trust. No man shall say that Thomas Lurting was a turkoat or a coward. When the call to action comes, I'll be on deck, in full view of the captain, and that's where you'll find me, friends, if any of you are of the same mind!'

He rose to his feet and passed through the midst of us. Jake came up and jostled against him violently, scoffing the while. 'Shall I kill you like the coward that you are, Thomas Lurting?' he sneered.

Lurting looked on him, and a queer look swept over his face., 'Jacob Grierson,' said he, 'your time has wellnigh come!' Jake fell back cursing, and followed him at a distance.

Roger Dennis rose to his feet. 'I'm for the deck, mates!' he said quietly.

'I, too!' said Stephen Whalen.

'And I!' said John, and one after another we filed after our leader.

'What are you going to do, Ned?' I asked, seeing him still beside me.

'I think you're the daftest set of fools in Christendom, but I'm coming too!' he said. 'If it's only to take Christopher's place!'

We went up on deck, and found that Lurting had taken up his stand in full view of the captain, with his back against the gear capstan. He looked round and saw us coming; his face lit up. 'He knows what to do now the time has come,' I thought. I felt no fear at all.

Jake whispered to the lieutenant, who looked at us suspiciously; avoiding Thomas Lurting, he grabbed John Whalen by the collar and ordered him to his quarters.

'I can fight no more!' said John soberly, looking him straight in the face.

The lieutenant swore roundly and went across to the captain. I heard the word 'mutiny' pass between them. The captain came down and thrashed John with his own cane, then and there, and had him dragged off to his quarters. The rest of us stood waiting. Thomas Lurting was facing the biggest fight of his life.

The captain went back on to the half-deck and

sent for his sword. His face was working in a passion of fury, and the nervous tic in his cheek beat like an animal struggling for freedom. He drew the sword and flourished it, and the morning sunshine flashed across the blade. Lurting shook, but it was not with fear. I heard him mutter to himself: 'The Sword of the Lord is over him: and if he will have a sacrifice, proffer it to him.' He looked over his shoulder to Roger Dennis. 'I'm going up to the captain, mate!' said he.

Roger Dennis looked at him searchingly. 'Are you sure, lad?' he asked.

'I must go!' said Lurting quietly.

'Then I'll stand by you, friend!' said Roger Dennis, and the two of them advanced together.

Thomas Lurting led the way steadily towards the captain, and Roger Dennis followed as steadily. I brought up the rear. They did not invite me or notice me, but somehow or other I felt that there must be somebody in the party who had his feet securely enough upon the ground to keep an eye on Jake. I was determined to prevent him from manœuvring a concerted rush of the seamen; I could tell by the frustrated look on his face that he knew what I had in mind.

The captain was speaking with the lieutenant on the quarter-deck; he wheeled round as he saw them coming, and menaced them with his drawn

sword. Lurting never flinched; with his eyes upon the captain he strode forward. His hands were at his sides, and his coat and shirt were torn open at the throat. The captain rushed forward and made as if to plunge the sword into his naked breast. We all held our breath, and Ned, honest fellow, came rushing up with his fists clenched. I caught him in my arms and we hung together in suspense. Thomas Lurting took one more step forward.

Crash! The sword fell clattering on to the deck. 'Take it away, curse you!' groaned the captain to his man, and he turned away towards the poop, still shaking with rage.

Lurting waited on the deck a while, and there was a tense silence, as if everybody was still holding his breath. Then he turned to Roger Dennis with a smile. 'Well, old friend!' he said, 'the captain has gone, it seems. Let us go too, and get back to the others!' They strode away side by side. There was no need of words between them.

I stood looking after them and then started to follow; Ned had already run on ahead. Suddenly the captain caught sight of me and hailed me. Jake saw to it that I did not escape. He would gladly have dragged me up on to the quarter-deck again by force, but I shook him off, and an older seaman pulled him back. I ran up as fast as I could, so as



The captain rushed forward and made as if to plunge the sword into his naked breast

not to give myself time to turn and run in the opposite direction. I was no Thomas Lurting. The captain came down from the poop in a passion of frustrated rage.

'So you were with the good-for-nothings, were you?' he screamed, and raising his cane, he struck me full across the face with it. 'There's been no luck aboard this ship since you came, you cursed little rat. I've lost the best man I ever had. I'll string you up for it one of these days.'

He rained down blows on my head and shoulders. Suddenly all fear left me. I realized then that he was suffering more than I. He had been defeated on his own quarter-deck by an unarmed man, in full sight of his crew. He might hang me if he would, but he could never wipe out that. And if he hanged me—well, Christopher had faced death.

He stopped beating me and glared into my face. 'Go to your quarters!' he snarled.

'No, sir!' I jerked out through my clenched teeth.

'Then, by heaven, I'll hang you! Where's——'

There was a hail from the look-out, and the lieutenant came running up. 'For God's sake give orders not to fire, sir!' he cried.

'Why, in hell's name?'

'She's no Spaniard, sir. She's from Genoa.'

'Call the men off!' commanded the captain and, striking me roughly to one side, strode back to his cabin. None of us saw him again that day.

That evening he sent the chaplain to Thomas Lurting, asking his pardon, and confessing that he had given way to passion.

'Tell the captain that I have nothing but goodwill to him and to all men living!' said Lurting. 'And bid him have a care of such passions, for if he killed a man in his passion, he might seek a place for repentance and might not find it.'

He turned to me after the chaplain had gone. 'Or killed a boy in his passion!' he repeated softly. 'Eh, Richard, my lad, must you always be running your head into hornets' nests?'

I grinned as well as my swollen face would allow me. 'Yes, when you lead the way, sir!' I said, and he ruffled my hair and bade me turn in.

That night the wind rose, and I could not sleep. Where I lay, the air was dank and heavy, and reeked of sweat and filth, stale food and bilge-water; up on deck the clouds were scudding across the sky, and the salt spray was dashing over the ship as she staggered in the trough of the waves. If this went on much longer, I thought, there would be little sleep eventually for most of us. I crept up for a breath of fresh air, and saw Jake stealing secretly along in the shadow of the bulwarks. He

was dead drunk. Every now and then a wave would dash full over him, but he would only chuckle foolishly and slither on. "

'Hullo, 'Charlie!' he said, when he caught sight of me watching him.

Fascinated, I drew near. 'Where are you going, mate?' I forced myself to ask.

'Crosh' your heart—never breath a word—Captain'sh watch—captain'sh guineash—take guineash myshelf and put ticker in Lurting'sh cabin—raise an alarm—see him dangle—Lor'! What a game!'

'You're 'drunk!' I said. 'It's you that will dangle. Get back into the forecastle!'

'Drunk? Who shaysh I'm drunk?' He turned on me, but I stayed his hand.

'Now then!' I expostulated. 'Didn't you take me for Charlie?'

'Sho I did! Good old 'Charlie! Losht hish head—got another now—good old Charlie!—have a drink?'

Try as I would, I could not get him back. There was no time to fetch anybody. Drunk as he was, he made his way into the officers' quarters with the ease born of long practice. I believe many of the petty thefts of which the officers had complained were to be laid at his door. I saw the lieutenant run full tilt into him, as he was coming up to view

the weather. I shrieked my warning just in time. The blow of Jake's knife fell wide in his drunken hand and the lieutenant ran him through. As the poor fellow was coughing his life away, the captain came out of his cabin.

Jake looked up at him, and his head seemed to clear. 'Sorry, cap'n!' he gasped. 'Drunk as a dog I was, and the little devil tried to stop me. It was—them guineas! I know all about 'em. And I'm sorry—about Mr. Waterson—'cos—if I'm to swing for anybody I'd rather it were for you!'

'Has the wretch knifed you, James?' asked the captain.

'No, sir!' said the lieutenant. 'The boy warned me, and I dodged just in time.'

'And what was the boy doing there?' asked the captain ominously.

'I told you—the little devil—tried to stop me!' muttered Jake. 'It's a good little devil—looks like Charlie with his head off—but it's—young Richard Croly—and if ever you touch him again, cap'n, I'll haunt you! D'you hear? I'll—haunt—you—horribly!'

• Those were his last words. Jake's hour had indeed come. He looked up at me, gave me a sudden smile, tried to speak, coughed blood, and died.

The captain called me to him and the lieutenant pushed me forward. Somehow I could hardly

move. The captain put his hand quite gently on my shoulder. 'Go down to Thomas Lurting,' he said, 'and tell him there's a stiff breeze blowing, and dirty weather ahead. And tell him I need him and his friends, every jack man of them. Tell him I need them!'

'Ay, ay, sir!' I cried, and ran off willingly.

I raced back along the heaving decks, dodging the waves and getting soaked to the skin, with a great shadow lifted off my heart, and a boy's joy in the strain of the storm. Hard work lay ahead of us all that night, hard work and the breath of adventure. 'Had life ever tasted so sweet before?' I reached the forecastle and dashed down into the cabin, calling for Thomas Lurting. The fight of his life had been won.

CHAPTER VII

Home

WHEN I came home, bundle on shoulder and parrot cage in hand, and put my head round the door of the cottage, Mother went as white as a ghost, put her hand to her heart, shrieked 'Dick!' and fainted. I rushed forward and raised her in my arms, cursing myself for a clumsy fool. For I knew then, that, boy as I still was, she had taken me for my father.

When she came to, she clung to me and sobbed out wild words of welcome. 'Richard! My son—my little son! I knew you would come back! Oh, I knew it!'

She raised the hair from my forehead and wept over the scar she found there; she put her lips on it and kissed it.

'What have they done to my darling?' she moaned, and kissed me again. Then, still with her hand in my hair, she drew back and gave me a long, long look. I have only to shut my eyes to see it still. She gave a little shudder; I could feel her hand tremble. 'Yes!' she whispered. 'Yes! You are growing very like him—so like him, Richard!'

I raised her and set her in her chair, and searched in the well-remembered cupboard for a

bottle of her own elderberry wine. I poured out a glass and set it before her. 'Very like him, maybe,' said I, 'but your son, Mother!'

She nodded. 'My son!' she said. 'Our son! When you grow into a man, Richard, you will be his very image. God send you never meet!'

'God send we do!' I said grimly.

She shook her head. 'It is better as it is,' she said quietly. 'The old hurt is a thing of the past, and the past is mine alone. I'll have no millstones about your neck, Richard. The future belongs to you.'

I laughed, and took a glass of the home-made wine. 'Here's to the future, Mother!' I said. 'Now, what of Uncle Matthew?'

'You will find him—greatly changed!' said my mother. 'He was very good to me, dear, after you were gone. Never forget that! But some time back he had a cruel stroke, and it seemed as if all his seventy odd years came upon him at once. He goes half-crippled now. But still he must needs go out to sea, and I cannot keep him ashore. And—there is no need——' She glanced round and then whispered in my ear: 'He grows very miserly, Richard. Your grandfather was a wealthy man, and your uncle has reaped a rich harvest from the sea. There is enough in the secret hiding-place behind his bed to make a gentleman of you

some day, Richard. I hear him counting it at night.'

I kissed her and swore I'd make a fine gentleman, with my rough seafaring ways. But she sighed, and vowed that if ever my father caught sight of me, he would take me away from her, whereat I protested, using more seaman's language than she cared to hear.

My uncle was helped in by one of his men. When he saw me he grunted: 'So ye've come back, have you? Silas!'

'Ay, sir?' said the fisherman.

'Ye can dismiss young Jack. My nephew takes his place.'

'But I never said——' I protested.

'No!' said my uncle. 'I say! Now, Mary, what's for supper?'

It was only what I had foreseen, and I knuckled under pretty well. I could tell that my mother was glad to have me there, and in many ways my uncle needed me. He was failing under our eyes, but woe betide any who told him, so! Most days he could no longer dress himself, and must needs grudgingly accept my help. I would make light of it, and pretend that I only did it as a mark of respect. Or I would say: 'There's a stiff wind blowing to-day, Uncle! Let me help you on with your coat. I could hardly get into mine this morning!'

One day he suddenly caught me by the shoulder. 'Ye're a good lad after all!' he said. 'Look after your mother!'

At sea he was more choleric than ever. He refused to be left on shore; wet or fine, calm or storm, he dragged himself or was carried on to the deck, and there he would crouch, holding on to the rigging, and directing us in the ghost of his former voice. Something of my old fear would creep over me as I saw him then, his hair and beard streaming in the wind, his eyes blazing, cracking out his commands in the teeth of the storm.

I served him thus two years or more. History rolled past us in the great world outside, but we recked little of it in our out-of-the-way corner. Very shortly after my return young Charles Stuart came to the throne as Charles II, and so the Commonwealth was over. Sometimes news trickled through from London through young Harry Greenwood, who was picking up some sort of a living as a writer there. He wrote once that the place was full of Quakers, 'every whit as mad as Richard and his friends, for they refuse to bear arms, and hold their meetings under the noses of their enemies, so that the prisons are full of them, leaving no room for honest malefactors.' It was the first time I had heard that the Quakers as a body bore no arms.

There were no Quakers anywhere near Paget Point, and nowadays there seemed to be very few dissenters. My uncle bade me think what I would, and gave me very little time to do it in. Since his stroke, everything had gone down before his ruling passions for money and the sea. My mother would sometimes cry out against him for driving me beyond my strength; I was growing fast, and not yet ready for a man's work. But he would only blaze out at me in one of his old furies, and I would beg of her to let him be. There was a queer bond between us now.

Many will remember the great storm which raged upon Paget Point in the winter of 1662. It was nearing the time of my seventeenth birthday, and my mother was making a cake for me, full of plums and fit to rejoice any boy's heart. She came out to the door, wiping her floury hands upon her apron, and begged us not to go.

'Silas says there's a great storm brewing,' she protested. 'And Silas is seldom wrong.'

'Silas is a chuckle-headed craven!' growled Uncle Matthew, and Silas flinched before him like a faithful dog whose master has whipped him without cause. 'Give us your arm, Richard.'

We went down the steep little path together, and out into the village. The harbour was almost deserted. Few men were venturing out to sea. Yet

it was calm enough, to all seeming; the waves were heavily quiet. An old fisherman hove towards us and spat into the water. 'Tell your uncle to bide at home, lad!' he said to me.

'Tell!' roared my uncle. 'Tell! It's I'm to do the telling while I'm above ground! If you're afraid of a bit of dirty weather, Ben, I'm not.'

Silas and the other fellow, a round-faced simpleton called Job, began to make ready the boat.

'Uncle!' I said.

'Ay?'

'You stop ashore, and let me take command this time!'

'You stop—you stop your mouth, boy, before I stop it for you! I'll have no ship's boy playing the captain on my boat. Lift me in!'

Silas lent me a hand, and we heaved him in. He seemed more helpless than ever, and his eyes were wild. I wondered, not for the first time, if he were going a little mad.

Straight out to sea we sped, and I looked back ashore, to see our little village picked out clearly in a shaft of lurid light. My mother stood at our cottage door, shading her eyes with her hand as she watched us go. How often had she stood thus, watching our little craft grow smaller and smaller as we braved the deep. I wondered then if she would ever watch it again.

In moments of great peril we seem to be strangely lifted outside ourselves. I fought the storm like a madman, drenched to the skin, buffeted by the wind, half-stripped by the gale, bruised and bleeding, with the breath half knocked out of me, but all the time my mind was so far removed that I could even pity myself in that unequal fight. Such strange thoughts came and went across my mind, of Mother and my unknown father, of Thomas Lurting and his fight with God, of Christopher and his fight with Life. When the great wave broke over us I made a desperate effort to save Silas and Job; then I saw them swept away from my grasp, to be lost sight of eternally under the waves. And even as I fell back, almost spent, my other self was up on deck with Christopher—'When you are back in England, go into Hertfordshire!'—and wondering why I had not been.

My uncle was quite mad. I had no doubt of it. He was chanting in the teeth of the wind: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, These see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep!'

Our little vessel was helpless. The mast was down and the rudder broken; there was nothing left for me to do except bale. Why I troubled to do that I do not know. It seemed hopeless. But I

baled till I could bale no more, and my uncle chanted in the stern. I had bound him to the tiller lest he be swept overboard. Did I loose him before we were overturned, or did he struggle clear with his madman's strength? It has all been knocked clean out of my memory. But I know that in the end we were tossing on a piece of wreckage that would only safely hold the one of us. I was fighting to loosen my belt, that I might lash him across it before I went down, when he gave a last shout: 'Bide where you are, lad!' and dropped into the sea.

'Isn't the deep a vasty thing?' These words of Thomas Lurting's rang in my ears then, and for many days afterwards. But none know how vast save those who have faced in it more than they can ever express. For there is no death to be found there, nor any life either; only an elemental struggle of wind and wave and flying spray, where strength crashes upon strength with a cruelty which is beyond cruelty, being raised above all finite things, and behind which and beyond which lie the unfathomable depths of the infinite peace of God.

Ben and his four sons plucked me out of the deep, and my mother nursed me back to life again. Silas and Job were never washed ashore, but they found my Uncle Matthew out on the rocks of the

Point, not far from where I used to hunt for sea-gull's eggs. They buried him on the cliff where so many of those whom the sea has given up have rested. Later my mother had a stone carved for him: 'Then are they glad because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.'

Slowly I regained my strength, but not my vigour of mind. Little by little my mother was making improvements in our cottage and in our way of living, but somehow I cared nothing for them. One day she persuaded me to go over to Belmouth and order myself a fine suit of clothes; her pride and joy in me when I put it on for her to see nearly made me weep for mortification that I could not share her pleasure. She took me to the old press in her room and showed me pile upon pile of fine linen, exquisitely sewn, folded in lavender. 'Will they be good enough for you when you are a gentleman, Richard?' she asked wistfully. I folded her in my arms and half smothered her with kisses, and vowed it was I that was not good enough for them and never would be.

There is indeed a grievous time between sickness and recovery, and in this trough of depression I lingered long. I was pulled out of it when spring time came by the arrival of dear old Ned, who turned up one day on a fine bay gelding, with a jolly young servant lad on a pony behind him. He

was quite the young gentleman, was Ned, with fashionable clothes, and a ring on his finger, and a hat with a curling feather. And the two years difference in our ages had given him time to broaden into a man, whereas I was still but a loose-limbed fisher lad. I felt almost abashed before him. Ere I could get a word out he had swept off his hat in a low bow to my mother, who had risen from her chair to curtsy.

'Your servant, Lady Croly!' said he emphatically. 'I am Ned Farrant, nobody in particular, but your son's unworthy friend. I share Richard's bed to-night, ma'am. And have you a corner for my servant, or shall I send him down to the inn?'

My mother was fluttered, but she received him with her natural grace and dignity. Lance was accommodated in the little loft where I had once slept, and while Ned and I settled down to talk over old times, he and Mother and the little serving maid who had recently joined our household busied themselves with preparations for a meal.

'I loathe writing letters!' began Ned, apologetically.

'I thought as much!' said I. 'The ink we two have spilled on paper this last year or so would not drown a fly. You did at least write and tell me you were reconciled with your father.'

'Up to a point!' grinned Ned. 'Why not?'

'And now you're a young man of fortune, I suppose,' I suggested.

'Not so much fortune,' rejoined Ned, 'with eight brothers and sisters, and a father very much out of favour. Our name still stinks a little in court circles, you know. But I manage pretty well on credit!' And he regarded his ruffles complacently.

'Ned, you old scamp! What are you doing here, anyhow?'

'I've been sent down from Oxford, and I'm on my way home.'

'On your *way*, you old idiot?'

'Well, it's as good a way as any! I had to see you again, and judging by the way you go about half drowning yourself, it's time I did. Also I doubt whether my father will welcome me with open arms this time, and I was pretty sure you would!'

'What were you sent down for?'

'I fought a fellow—one of the Court set, too!'

'What about?'

Ned grinned at me, his eyes twinkling; he looked the snub-nosed boy again. 'That's the funny part of it, Richard!' he said. 'The drunken blackguard was insulting the women in a Quakers' meeting. I'd just—dropped in. I do, sometimes, for Thomas Lurting's sake. I didn't interfere

then, because I couldn't. By heaven, Richard, you should have seen the look on the faces of those women. They might have been sitting at the feet of Christ. Gad! This persecution makes me sick! But Thomas Lurting, or no Thomas Lurting, I let him have a few insults to be going on with, when I saw him afterwards in the High Street, and we met as soon as he was sober enough to handle a sword.'

'Did you kill him?'

'I didn't wait to find out. His father is a favourite, and mine isn't. But I don't think mine will be pleased to see me, do you?—I say, Richard, did you ever go to Hertfordshire?'

'No. But I'll go some day. I promised. Thomas Lurting told me he had been to tell them, and had found them—very like Christopher. And the cousin had died, and another cousin had inherited, a good man, who let them bide where they were. You knew that, didn't you?'

'Yes. He told me. And as a matter of fact, he's there now, or will be soon.'

'How so?'

'He wrote and told me that he felt a need to go, and that he hoped he would see me there. I don't quite understand, but I suppose he does. His word is good enough for me, anyway. I never felt I wanted to go without you, so—here I am!'

My mother had been standing by us, listening to the last few sentences. 'Mr. Farrant,' she said quietly.

'Ned, you mean!' he interrupted. 'Well, ma'am?'

'Richard has been very ill, as you know. I think perhaps he needs to leave this place until he finds new life again. He shall go with you to meet your friend in Hertfordshire—but—Ned—I would not have him go save as a gentleman's son should go—I——'

'Of course, ma'am, I'll see to that!' exclaimed Ned.

My mother drew herself up. 'That is my privilege!' she said simply. 'Only go with him in the morning to buy a horse, and whatever else is necessary, and—let it be a good horse, Ned! His father would not have looked at any other.'

Next day she thrust into my hands a well-stocked purse, containing more than many a gentleman could call his own in ready money. I expostulated with her in vain. 'This is far more than my needs will warrant, Mother dear!' I said. 'You will regret it, maybe, when we buy our new fishing smack and I get to work again. We'll need all our little capital when I set out to follow in my uncle's footsteps.'

She shook her head. 'We'll buy no fishing

craft!' she said. 'And it will not be in your uncle's footsteps that you follow. Get ready, my son, and then kiss me before you go, for something tells me that it will be a long time before you come to me again.'

She repeated this last once more as we were leaving, and I laughed lovingly in her face. 'Hertfordshire is not the world, Mother!' I said.

'But you are going into the world, my son!' she said. 'God bless and keep you, for I think you are going into danger, and God send you safely back to me in his own good time.'

I had forgotten that we should pass through Buckinghamshire. Ned glanced at me 'with a twinkle in his eye as we crossed the border, and began to whistle that exasperating little tune of his.

'Have you still got the recorder?' I asked.

'Yes. What a hot-headed young fool you were! Do you know we shall pass near Croy Chase?'

My heart beat fiercely, but I said no word. I had a strange feeling that I had been travelling all my life to come into that place. We stopped at a little inn by the wayside to refresh ourselves.

'You seem very quiet here, landlord!' observed Ned. 'I would not be an innkeeper in such a hole.'

'Oh, but, sir!' rejoined the stout old man, 'you should see us on a market day, or any save to-day,

for that matter. All the folk round about have gone to see Lord Croly married.'

'*What?*' I sprang forward and caught him by the collar.

He stared at me in blank astonishment, and a dazed look of recognition spread over his broad face. 'In God's name, who are you, young sir?' he gasped.

'Never mind who I am, but tell me the truth! What did you mean by what you said just now?'

'Asking your honour's pardon, and I'm sure I meant no harm—I'll swear it's true. Ever since my lady died—and she was a good lady though a Frenchwoman—we've known it would happen. His ward she is, poor child, and barely seventeen—oh, a pretty morsell! Why, her old nurse came here crying and telling me of it weeks ago. As if she weren't too great an heiress for his lordship to let slip through his fingers! Lady Theresa Fayne her name is; ye'll have heard of Fayne, mayhap, though it's but a little place, they tell me.'

'Fayne'—I knew the name well enough. My mother had been born and bred there. I loosed the man and flung down a coin in payment for the drinks we had not touched. 'Come, Ned!' I said. 'Now, good fellow, where's the church?'

He looked at me doubtfully. 'You'll not make any trouble?' he quavered.

'I'll make trouble for you if we're late for the wedding!' I snarled. 'Which way?'

He pointed with a trembling finger. 'Yonder!' said he. 'It's nigh on a couple of miles.'

I flung myself on to my horse and set off at a gallop. Ned shouted directions to Lance to bide where he was with the baggage, and then galloped after me. 'No doubt about it, Richard!' he grinned as he caught me up. 'You were born an aristocrat if your manners are anything to go by. But what are you going to do when you get there?'

I did not know myself. I put my horse to a hill, and he crashed up it like the brave beast he was. From the summit we could see the church tower and a crowd of people.

'No peals as yet!' panted Ned. 'Can't be over!'

Down hill we galloped abreast, and so through a little wood and across a bridge. There were some white ducks swimming on the stream. We thundered on past a group of cottages, and so came to the church gate. The people scattered as we drew rein. I heeded none of them. I heard some cry out as they saw my face, and one would have stopped me, but I brushed past him. Ned followed close behind me. Through a low-browed Norman porch I strode, into the dimness of an ancient church. From old monuments around its walls

my ancestors looked down upon me in stone. Up the aisle we clattered, and the old clergyman looked up in mild reproof.

'... Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they should not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or else forever hold his peace.'

'I speak!' I cried, and my voice rang out strangely under the rafters. I pushed my way through the people who were all about me, and so confronted my father for the first time. And then I knew why all had looked upon me so strangely. For the face which rose up in fury before me was as my own face.

'Proceed with the service!' he commanded stiffly.

'My lord, I cannot!' said the clergyman gravely. 'This young gentleman must first explain himself. May I ask who you are, my son, and what right you may imagine yourself to have to interfere at this most sacred moment?'

I looked my father straight in the face, and raised my voice so that all could hear. 'My name is Richard Croly, sir!' I said, 'and I interfere on behalf of my mother, Lady Croly, formerly Miss Mary Linday of Fayne, and now living at Paget Point, and also on behalf of this unfortunate young lady, to whom I offer my deepest respects.'

I bowed low to the white-faced bride, and then faced my father again.

'You lie!' he sneered. 'Mr. Unwin, this is the brawling son of my cousin's serving maid. Pray let me bid my lackeys turn him out, so that we may proceed!'

The clergyman hesitated. Then a small voice, crystal clear, said 'No!' The bride came forward and looked into my face. She was a slender girl, with dark hair and eyes, and a proud, sensitive mouth. 'I have heard rumours of this story at Fayne,' she said. 'I had dismissed them as untrue. But you are his very image save in one thing only, that yours is an honest face. And therefore I believe your word against his.' She turned to her guardian and Mr. Unwin, and swept a low curtsy. 'Forgive me, gentlemen!' said she proudly. 'This cannot proceed. The bride refuses her consent!'

She turned to pass through the congregation. Ned leapt forward, bowed, and offered her his arm. Her old nurse bustled up, weeping, and took her other hand. Thus supported, with queenly dignity, she left the church. Lord Croly made as if to pursue her, but I barred his way. He drew himself up to his full height and towered over me. The inconsequential thought flitted across my mind that I might hope to grow up into a pretty figure of a man.

'You are safe enough here, boy!' he said, 'and you know it. Nevertheless, I warn you, you had better keep out of my way.'

'I am not afraid of you, sir, or of any man living!' I replied. 'If you wish to discuss this matter with me further, I am at your service.'

'Then you had better come with me,' he said grimly.

I took my life in my hands and followed him.

CHAPTER VIII

We meet in Hertfordshire

MY father was undoubtedly what is known as a fine gentleman. I rode beside him with my head up, but I had much ado to keep my courage from oozing out of my boots. He rode a fine black stallion. It was a mettlesome beast, but he sat it easily, his long sensitive fingers resting lightly but firmly on the reins. I watched his profile covertly; it was very clear cut, and his lips were close and firm. There was little hope of softness or relenting there. I wondered if I had been mad to think of pleading my mother's cause with him. Yet that was why I had come.

'Where is Lady Theresa?' he asked curtly of his steward, who rode near us.

'She went towards the Chase, my lord,' said he, 'with Mrs. Fenwick, and the young gentleman who accompanied—this young gentleman, my lord!'

'Humph! Boy, who's your fellow conspirator?' he rapped out contemptuously.

'My friend's name is Edward Farrant, sir,' I replied.

'One of the Farrants of Hatherfield?'

I nodded.

'Indeed? Sir Edward Farrant's son, I suppose. A very honourable acquaintance!'

'So honourable that he ran away to join Prince Rupert when his father—wasn't honourable!' I rejoined hotly.

'And joined the Roundhead navy instead!' continued my father imperturbably. 'And got himself mixed up in a mutiny with some low-down Quakers. I know more about it than you think, you see. A most respectable acquaintance!'

I was going to reply hotly again, but something made me change my mind. He could give me temper for temper, I felt sure. I had inherited more than my looks, such as they were, from him. But to ride my temper as he rode that high-spirited horse of his, that would be man's work. I met his contemptuous look as firmly as I could. 'As you say, sir, a most respectable acquaintance!' I agreed coolly.

He looked keenly at me, and we rode on in silence. A long avenue of horse chestnuts leads up to Croly Chase. In spring the trees blaze like gorgeous candelabra; in the autumn young rascals risk their necks to bring down a harvest of conkers. Up that avenue we rode in silence; I sat my horse with my shoulders squared, and my heart beating high for my mother's sake. For I knew then, and I know now, that she was every whit as worthy to

be called mistress of that stately pile as any Lady Croly who had gone before her, though she lived in a fisherman's cottage and moved amongst fisherfolk. My pride in her stung me into a contempt for him which swallowed up my fear. Boy as I was, I got no farther. Some words of Thomas Lurting's came drifting into my mind, but I dismissed them as irrelevant. 'Tell the captain that I have nothing but goodwill to him and to all men living. And bid him have a care of such passions.' I was no Thomas Lurting. His weapon was not yet in my armoury.

Ned was waiting for me. He pressed close behind me as I followed my father within, and whispered in my ear, 'She's an angel!' I had no idea what he meant.

We entered a small, oak-panelled room, with a huge fireplace above which our crest and coat of arms were carved in stone. Over the chimney-piece hung the portrait of a Tudor gentleman, very old-fashioned to my eyes in his ruff and slashed doublet. He had my father's features in a noble face—we must not needs be villainous, I thought.

'Do you know what you have done?' snapped my father.

'Yes, sir!' said I briefly. My only safety lay in brevity, for my wit could not match his.

'Your mother still lives, then?' he inquired.

'Ay, sir. She has made no secret of her habitation. You could have found her had you sought her out.'

'And what proof have you that she is my wedded wife?' he asked.

I was about to answer, when it suddenly struck me that, behind his contempt, there was a certain strain of hidden anxiety in his voice. He did not know what proof I had. There was accessible proof to be found, and he was fearful lest I should have discovered it. If ever I had wanted triumphant evidence of the truth of my mother's story, I had it now.

'You know what proof I have!' I countered. 'And you know I will not rest till she is righted!'

He looked me up and down then and bit his lip. I knew that he was plotting to be rid of me. But I had not the intuition to know that he was regretting the necessity of getting rid of me. It did not occur to me that he was experiencing the strong man's craving for his son, or that he would have died of shame rather than own it. I had no goodwill towards him that I should think of these things, and because of that lack, I had no weapon against him. I came not as a son, but as an avenger, and as such I stood in deadly peril.

'So you will not rest till she is righted?' he

sneered. 'Nevertheless, I must ask you to rest a little whilst I consider the matter. It is not every gentleman of property who has a ready-made son and heir to forbid the banns on his wedding-day. You must admit that it is a little disconcerting. Perhaps if the late Lady Croly had presented you with a rival, you would have introduced yourself to me a little sooner.'

I rushed at him then, but Ned held me back. 'I care not a fig for your property!' I cried. 'As for my mother——'

'A little compensation would doubtless vastly improve her residence at Paget Point!' he mocked.

I struggled desperately against Ned's restraining arms. 'Let me go, Ned!' I panted.

'Not on your life!' he whispered urgently. 'Can't you see that he's egging you on? He'd run you through as soon as look at you, and say he did it in self-defence. Keep cool!'

I stood my ground again. 'We lose our tempers, sir!' I said.

'We? Humph! If I had had the upbringing of you, yours would have been whipped out of you long ago. Under those circumstances, you might have made a very creditable lackey.'

He saw that he could rouse me no further, and so strode past us to the door. With his hand on the latch he turned. 'When I have considered the



I rushed at him then, but Ned held me back

matter and consulted Mr. Unwin, I will return, he said, and left us.

Ned sat down and shook his head. 'Hornets' nests again,' Richard! said he. 'But what a girl!' 'Which girl?' I asked.

'Lady Theresa, of course. You numskull! Have you no eyes in your head? But I suppose now we had better get out of this before your amiable father comes back. He'll lay you by the heels if he gets the chance, you mark my words!'

Ned crossed the room and tried the door. It was securely locked. We looked out of the window. Below us was a sheer drop to a small paved courtyard, where sat a couple of stout menservants, playing at dice."

'Hornets' nests again!' muttered Ned. 'What are we going to do now?'

The key turned softly in the lock, and a hooded figure slipped in.

'Mr. Farrant!' whispered a voice.

Ned spun round. 'Lady Theresa!' he exclaimed.

She hurried forward, the crimson hood falling from her soft, dark curls. 'You are in deadly danger, sir!' she went on. 'And you too, cousin Richard! My uncle will have you both overpowered and shipped across the seas!' She wrung her little hands at us. 'What are you waiting for,

gentlemen?' she wailed. 'Don't you know this means slavery or death?'

Ned took her hand gently. 'We know it only too well,' he said. 'God bless your brave heart which prompted you to warn us!'

'And save you!' she urged. 'There is yet time.'

'We thank you a thousand times, cousin,' I said. 'But what is going to happen to you if we escape with your help?'

'Mrs. Fenwick and I are going away,' she answered. 'He dares not stop us. We will go to Fayne; we were always happy there. And I will claim the King's protection; my father had many friends at Court. I am not afraid except for you. Oh, hurry, hurry!'

He was still holding her hand. He pressed his lips to it and, timidly, she touched his hair. And then I knew that scapegrace Ned had grown into a man.

She hurried us along by a dim passage way. A groom was watching the door, and she pressed money into his hand. Another held our horses, and him she had no need to bribe. 'God bless your sweet face, lady!' he cried. 'Which way do you go, young gentlemen?'

'Into Hertfordshire!' we told him frankly.

'Then I'll say ye rode west!' he grinned. When I had mounted, he laid his hand on my rein and

looked up at me. 'You're his very image, sir, and your grandfather's, too, if pictures tell the truth,' he said. 'Some day you will come back to us again. God send I live to see it!'

I shook his hand and was proud to shake it. He would not take the gold I offered him. I turned to Ned, but he sat motionless on his horse. Lady Theresa stood at his stirrup and looked up into his face.

'We shall meet again, God willing!' he vowed.

'God have you in his keeping!' she said bravely.

We rode off then as fast as we might, picking up a round-eyed Lance at the inn, shaking off those who would have delayed us, and so, after a brief detour to blind our pursuers, hell for leather into Hertfordshire.

'There's a village there called White May . . . Mother and Philippa will be waiting.' They were. They were both so like him in spite of Philippa's sunny hair and blue eyes. She seemed a little thing, scarcely up to my shoulder. Thomas Lurting came from the orchard and gripped us both by the hand. Then we went with him and with them, to sit beneath the apple blossom and talk of Christopher. After that we waited in silence a while. It was good to be there. And I knew then that even the vasty deep could not hold Christopher from us.

'I'm thankful ye came in time, lads,' said Thomas Lurting. 'For I'm away on a long voyage as mate to George Pattison, all being well, and it would have grieved me had I missed you.'

'Why shouldn't all be well?' I asked bluntly. I had noticed something in his voice.

'I say it with good reason,' he replied, 'for I'm hard put to it to keep out of the hands of the press gang these days.'

'You look as likely a man for the navy as ever!' laughed Ned. 'Why can't you keep out of their way?'

'I'll not skulk round corners to avoid them!' declared Lurting, knotting his great hands around his knees. 'If I see them I must face them. Last year I was taken at Harwich before ever we had landed, and because I would not go willingly they tied a rope round my waist, and hoisted me aboard the *Mary* with a tackle as if I had been a wild beast. After that they paid no more heed to me, so I went on to the half-deck and lay down between two guns, and passed the night very well.'

'You can still make yourself at home amongst the guns, then?' said Ned. 'If they had known how well you could use them they would never have let you go. How did you get away?'

Lurting shrugged his shoulders. 'It's a long tale!' he protested.

'Tell us!' we urged.

Little Philippa curled up at his feet like a kitten and looked up into his face. 'Please tell us!' she begged. I do not think he could have refused her anything.

'The steward came to me next morning, and asked my name. 'For what?' I asked him.

"So that you may get your 'victuals,'" said he.

'Said I: "It will be time enough when I come for my victuals!" and that was all.

'I touched no food for five days, only taking at times a drink of water. I knew that if I had taken their meat they would have kept me. The seamen, good lads, would have shared all they had; I accepted of their love, but none of their victuals.

'The captain was an ill-tempered man and often drunk, so that I could get no word with him. I prayed God to help me either to stand up to him or to keep quiet. On the sixth day he sent for me. He was on the half-deck with his officers.

'The man who was conducting me said: "You must pull off your hat when you come to the captain!" but I would have none of it, so we were at outs. But the captain called to him to let me alone, for he knew all about the Quakers. So I told him that I had been as big a fighter as any in my time, but that that time had now passed. He offered me

a command, so that I should take no part in killing or wounding, but this I would not have. So then he offered me to sail the ship only, and then to bring up beer for the men, and then to help the surgeon down below. But I would have none of all this. Dear lads, it's all an assistance, and having turned my back on war, I will not so much as put my little finger to it.

"I'll send you ashore to prison!" swore the captain.

"I am in your hands," said I. "You may do what you will with me."

"But I hear you're starving yourself!" said he.

"Not so!" said I. "I have money in my pocket, and if you will sell me any victuals I will eat before you!"

"I cannot sell the King's victuals!" he replied.

"Neither can I do the King's work," said I, "and therefore I cannot eat the King's victuals!"

'He put me ashore after that, and let me go where I would.'

Philippa, who had been absorbed in listening to his story, gave a little sigh of relief. 'Oh, I'm so thankful!' she exclaimed. 'But go on, sir, do please go on! Did you get safely back to your ship?'

Lurting smiled down at her. 'Yes, and was pressed again after two or three days!' he replied.

'A man-o'-war sent a boat to board us, and the coxswain swore he would have me, for I was a lusty rogue! I was stripped for work, heaving corn into a lighter. He swore he would flog me if I did not come, whereupon I told him that if he did not flog me I might possibly come with him, but that if he did, I certainly would not. The captain came and scoffed at me, saying I was no Quaker, for if I were I would be waiting upon the Lord and letting the ravens feed me.

'I said nothing for a while. If you can't find the right thing to say, lads, it's better to be quiet. Then I told him I had never heard a Quaker blamed for doing a bit of honest work before.

"'You're no Quaker!'" he insisted. "You are bringing in corn to be made into bread, and by the strength of that bread we kill the Dutch. Are you not as accessory to their death as we? Answer me!"

'Again I could not speak for a moment. The men were jeering around me. Then at last I found words. "I am a man that can feed my enemies, and well may I feed you who pretend to be my friends!"

"'Turn him away!'" said the captain. "He's a Quaker!"

'I was glad to be left to get on with my work. It wasn't for long, as it happened. I was pressed again only a few days later. That time was a hard

time, because the captain was very violent against the Quakers, and I could find little to say to him. There was nothing for it but to listen to him quietly, and that put him into such an unrest of mind that he could not sleep until I had been put ashore. But you see, lads, I do well not to count on making a voyage with George Pattison until we have actually weighed anchor.'

Ned was looking thoughtfully at me. 'What sort of a man is George Pattison?' he asked.

'A small man of bold spirit, and a Quaker,' replied Lurting. 'Why?'

'Has he a full crew?'

'I doubt it in these days!' smiled Lurting. 'But again, why?'

'Because I think,' said Ned slowly, 'that our rascal of a Richard here would be safer out of England for a few months!' Then he told him the whole story.

Lurting looked uneasy. 'Safer out of England?' said he. 'He's not safe a moment where he is. Dear boy, your father will not rest until—you must ride south with me at once. We have no time to spare!'

'And you, Ned?' I asked, somewhat ruefully. 'You'll go back to your father, I suppose?'

'By all the thunders of hell, no!' roared Ned. 'I'm coming too!'

'You, Ned?' Lurting smiled. 'Look at your clothes!'

'I haven't forgotten how to wear slops!' urged Ned. 'And I can still handle a rope. And I've got my father into enough trouble as it is, without staying behind to get him into some more. Take me away and keep me out of mischief a while, Thomas Lurting! You're the only one who could ever do it!'

Mistress Mallory spoke simply then, and her eyes were full of wisdom. 'It is the right thing for you all to do. That is why you came here. God's blessing rests on it!'

Philippa tugged at Lurting's sleeve. 'You will be quick,' she begged, 'and not let Richard's father catch him!'

She blushed then and turned away. His smile was very kind. 'I'll take them safely out of mischief!' he laughed. 'Ned, send Lance to your father with a message, and some of your fine clothes. Don't forget to put that ring in, or I'll pitch it into the Channel for you! Richard, a line to your mother before you stir another step. And then little Philippa is right; delay is dangerous. God guide us all!'

We stood together for a moment; silence fell upon us. The late afternoon sunshine streamed down through the branches, and the rose-pink

petals fell slowly about us from the gnarled boughs of the apple trees. All around was still. Then a bird sang out into the heart of the spring, and another answered him. And we raised our heads again and smiled at each other, because there was no fear left in our hearts.

CHAPTER IX

Taken by the Turks

IT was good to be a member of George Pattison's crew. After our frigate, his little ketch seemed a mere cockle-shell, but she was a sturdily built little craft, and we grew very fond of her. George Pattison was a small man, very spare and active; his kindly eyes were set in a network of fine wrinkles. He was a man of few words, and slow to take action, but his quiet strength and fearlessness inspired respect, and we all knew that we could depend on him. Only Lurting knew him really well, and in spite of certain differences in their characters, there was a deep friendship between them.

I believe that, in the depths of his heart, Ned was glad to be back at sea again. The very evening before our arrival one of Pattison's crew had been taken in the street by the press gang, so he signed on in his place. There was no job left for me save that of ship's boy, and though I secretly did not think it accorded well with the dignity of my added inches, I was glad enough to take it. Lurting pulled my ears for me when he saw my look, and smilingly reminded me that I was still but a lad.

We slipped out of the Thames with a fair wind behind us, and as I tasted the salt tang of the spray on my lips, and felt the deck springing beneath my bare feet, I sang aloud for the joy of freedom. I had remained below until we were clear of London, for Thomas Lurting still feared lest my pursuers should capture me. We had ample evidence on the road that my father was scouring the country for us.

We had ridden into London before dawn, by circuitous ways, and I had had but a vague impression of richly carved old houses leaning amicably towards each other across the cobbled streets, of stately modern buildings here and there, and of the fine palaces and gardens of the noblemen down by the river. I had caught a glimpse of the grey tower of St. Paul's, brooding over the city, and of London Bridge, the wonder of the world. The houses on the bridge were all still and quiet in the pearly light of morning; over its forbidding gateway the grinning skulls of traitors told their own tragic story, and below, the darkness of the great arches was relieved by the flashing spray, as the swift tide of the river chafed unceasingly against the broad starlings.

From this great pageant of history and progress I was straightway banished, stowed away amongst the cargo so that even the seamen could not say

where I was hidden. 'Better so, lad!' said Lurting, as he stacked me round with merchandise. 'Better so than lying stanned or bound hand and foot, to be shipped overseas and sold into slavery.' It was indeed better so. No wonder I sang upon the deck until Ned rolled me over and rubbed my nose in the scuppers for me.

We worked very happily for George Pattison, and I think he did good trade. The months slipped by quickly enough, for it was a fine life for Ned and me, and we enjoyed it to the full. We were not overworked unduly, and often we could go ashore and explore strange towns up and down the Mediterranean coast. Winter was just beginning to set in when we left Venice to sail homewards. The air was crystal clear, the sky a dazzling blue, and the rose-pink campaniles and domes and marble palaces glittered in the sunlight. I remember well how regretfully we left her; her great days were over, so they said, but there was still enough loveliness about her to unsteady our heads a little.

'I wish we could have stayed longer!' I said moodily, looking back along our wake.

'I don't!' said Ned briefly.

'You old hypocrite!' I jeered.

'I tell you I don't, and I mean it! It's—cleaner here. You don't understand, I suppose. But those young fellows in the Piazza, and that great lady

we saw entering her gondola—you know, the one with the painted face—had my father been in the King's favour, and had you been your father's acknowledged son, we should have been here in leading strings with a tutor, and those would have been our friends. We're better as we are. You don't know how much better, Richard.'

I was going to kick him for his superiority, when an English ship came within hail of us.

'Whither bound?' shouted the mate, as we drew near.

'Home!' replied George Pattison, leaning out from the shrouds.

'Then have a care! The Turkish men-o'-war are out, and many English merchantmen have been taken.' Bad cess to the vermin and good luck to ye all, mates!

George Pattison shouted his thanks and then stepped back on deck again. He went down into his cabin and remained there awhile. Thomas Lurting made as if to follow him, then shook his head doubtfully and turned back to the rest of us. 'You lazy, good-for-nothing, lily-livered lubbers, get back to your work!' he roared. We did not wait to be told twice.

We met the same story again as we left the Adriatic. The men became very restive, and even threatened to mutiny. A slant-eyed fellow called

Sam was their ringleader, and he became very abusive as we rounded Italy. Pattison paid little heed to him; I doubt if he even heard him, for he seemed to be living in another world. But Lurting was growing visibly worried.

'It's their lives, boy, it's their lives!' he said to me. 'At the worst it's death, at the next worst it's slavery, and there's no best except the possibility of rescue or ransom, and that's pretty remote. I've gone along the Algerian coast many a time in a man-o'-war, and seen some poor devil of a slave swimming out, trying to reach us. If they made us—safety; if they sank—drowning; if they were hauled back again—torture and death! And the tales they told us—! No, lad, I was prepared to go a pretty long way to save you when your father would have sent you into that hell.'

'What will George Pattison do?' I asked.

Lurting shook his head. 'Nothing!' he replied. 'And I—can't—quite—see my way.'

Sam came lounging over with the other men at his back. 'Well, Mr. Lurting, are you going to the master, or are we?' he asked truculently.

Lurting looked at him coolly. 'Sam,' said he, 'don't you realize we're all in this? There's no difference between master and mate and seaman when they get to Algeria!'

'I know,' said Sam sullenly.

'Well, what's all this conspiracy about? Any other master would have you flogged for mutiny. Can't you trust George Pattison?' •

'I'd trust him anywhere!' said Sam. 'It's this Inner Light of his that's the trouble. It may be telling him to go and convert the Turks for all we know!' He smiled then. His one straight eye had a pleasant twinkle in it sometimes. His face softened. 'See here!' he said. 'You and the master have got your own ideas, and you're welcome to 'em so far as we're concerned. I've no quarrel with the Quakers, and never had. But I've a wife and two children at home; Slim here has an old widowed mother; Joe's got a girl waiting for him, and so has Red Rodger for that matter; old Davy has his sister's children to feed, since his brother-in-law was drowned a couple of winters back, and Jem has six of his own. You can't ask us to sail straight into the arms of the Turks. Risks there must be in a sailor's trade, but this kind of thing—well—it don't make sense, do it, boys?'

'No!' they growled.

'No more it does!' said Lurting coolly. 'I'll go to the master.'

Sam's jaw dropped. 'You'll—what'll you say to him?' he asked.

'I shall suggest that we go to Leghorn and wait for a convoy,' said Lurting heavily. 'And I will

say that for as long as we have to wait, every jack man of us will forgo his wages.'

He pushed his way through them and went to the master. They were closeted together for a long time. When he returned his face wore a curious expression, half relief, half resignation.

'Well, sir?' demanded Sam.

'He does not feel free to accept the protection of a convoy,' said Lurting steadily. 'We keep to the sea. Get back to your work.'

The men argued no longer. Lurting was looking dangerous. I found him late that evening, leaning over the gunwale, looking out to sea with a frown on his face.

'George Pattison doesn't worry about it!' I said. 'Why do you?'

Because I know that we are going to be taken!' said he.

After that there was a queer feeling of inevitability about it all, when we saw the dark lateen sails of the 'Turkish man-o'-war on the horizon. We made a good run for it, all the same. We were heading for Majorca, where George Pattison had business, and we hoisted every inch of canvas we had. This proved in the end to be our undoing, for we hoisted more than she could carry under the prevailing wind, and some of our tackle gave way. Ned and I were up aloft, helping to repair the

damage, and in the brief intervals when the ship appeared to be more above the ocean than below it, we watched the Turk draw nearer and nearer. She was a wicked looking craft. We wished her at the bottom of the sea.

Her captain hailed us, and ordered the master aboard. Lurting called us all down from the rigging, and George Pattison looked us over. He picked out four men to go with him, Davy, Slim, Red Rodger, and Joe, and bade the rest of us be mindful of our duty to Thomas Lurting and to the ship. He did not seem in the least perturbed, but shook hands with Thomas Lurting and leaped into the boat. We hung from the shrouds and watched them go. None of us could tell what was going to happen, or whether we should ever all meet again.

The Turks took all our men aboard, and I could see Rodger's red head going up last of all. So far as we could tell, they were not being ill treated. Then Ned exclaimed in comical dismay, 'Save us, they're sending fourteen of their own ugly beggars in exchange! What are we to do with 'em?'

Thomas Lurting was watching their approach with a puzzled frown on his face. I had seen him look like that often when he had a big decision to make. He was not a man to whom things came

easily—are there such men, I wonder? ‘Receive them as a man might his friends,’ he said, and moved away.

I doubt if any of us were without qualms when we saw the Turks come pouring over the side. They were armed to the teeth, and they looked round threateningly in case any of us should raise so much as a finger. None of us did, save Thomas Lurting, who came forward with his hands outstretched to welcome them. As much to their surprise as ours, he freely offered to take them over the vessel, and showed them every part and all we carried. Then he left them to make a further inspection of the cargo, while he came back to talk to us.

Ned and I were keeping an eye on the ship; we trusted him implicitly to pull us through somehow. Sam and Jem were sitting side by side in black despair. Poor Jem was whispering over the names of his six little ones, like a Roman Catholic telling his beads. Lurting laid a hand gently on his shoulder and looked round at the rest of us. ‘Be not afraid!’ he said. ‘For all this, you shall not go to Algiers.’ He sounded as if he was repeating something he had heard.

‘How so?’ groaned Jem.

‘I cannot tell as yet,’ he replied. ‘But when I saw them coming up the ship’s side, sure as I

stand here I felt the word of the Lord run through me. Be not afraid, for all this, thou shalt not go to Algiers. I know that this is true. Meanwhile, do as I bid you; be civil to them, and obey them as willingly as you would obey me. Remember, lads, those are my orders.'

'Ay, ay, sir!' said the four of us.

Ned skipped smartly round as one of the Turks came up from the hold. 'Just watch me with old Ugly-Mug here!' he grinned.

'Steady, Ned!' warned Lurting.

'Right you are, sir!' Ned reassured him. He bowed low before the Turkish captain, who looked considerably surprised. 'At your service, your worship!' said he.

'You help carry?' asked the captain doubtfully, not quite understanding his attitude.

'Certainly, your lordship! Anything you like, from the master's watch to the bowsprit! Come on, Richard, it's your turn now!'

The captain's English was scanty, but he interpreted our attitude as being wholly admirable, if astonishing. Ned and I went down into the hold, and found the Turks squabbling over the spoils. The captain descended upon them with fury, drawing his weapon and laying about him with the flat of it. 'You put back!' he told us, pointing to various bundles which some of the men had

evidently appropriated as their own. We stacked them up willingly enough, and then shouldered two of the packages which had been put aside for removal to the man-o'-war. The Turks took the others, and we filed up on deck and heaved them over into the boat.

Meanwhile, Thomas Lurting had made Sam and Jem prepare drinks for our captors. The captain smiled as he took his in his lean brown hand. 'You good man!' he said. 'You no make trouble. You ver' good man!'

He smiled, and his white even teeth flashed in his dark face. Lurting looked at him steadily. 'These are all good men!' said he.

The captain nodded and tossed off his drink. I wondered if he was calculating how much we would fetch in the slave market at Algiers. He told off six of his men to row back to the man-o'-war, and then proceeded to navigate our vessel. We went about our work with very heavy hearts, for our course was changed, and we were making for Algiers as well as we could against the gale which was raging. The captain issued his orders through Thomas Lurting, who rapped them out readily enough, though they bore heavily upon us. The Turks stood aloof, and confined their activities to guarding us, so that we four were doing eight men's work in the teeth of the growing storm.

I came down from the rigging at last, with the breath half blown out of me, to find Thomas Lurting, his brows knitted, looking across at the Turkish man-o'-war. 'We're but the master on board,' said he, 'and the rest of the men, if there were twice as many Turks I should not fear them.'

'I'll fear drowning more than slavery if this goes on!' said I. 'If those lazy dogs of infidels don't turn to, we'll be lost to a man—sorry, sir! I know we're supposed to be treating them as friends and brothers, but I didn't notice any of them offering to join us up there, or out on the bowsprit an' hour or so ago either, for that matter! Next time you're ordering me out on to that confounded bowsprit, send one of my brothers to keep me company!'

Thomas Lurting was not listening. He was watching the Turkish captain, who was signalling to his lieutenant on the man-o'-war.

'Anything wanted, cap'n?' he asked.

The captain turned to him. 'Weather not good,' he explained. 'My men no work foreign ship. You all good men, make no trouble. Boat coming back. Why that boy he no work?'

'I've come to you for orders, sir!' I said, though it stuck in my throat a little.

'Then you go down make ready master's cabin. Me and officer sleep there.'

'Are you turning him out, sir?' I asked indignantly.

'Oh, no!', he purred. 'Oh, no! We ver' fond your master; like sleep with him. If you make rising—cut his throat. 'Ver' sad!'

He looked slyly at Thomas Lurting, who turned to me roughly and said: 'Obey the captain's orders, Richard!'. I went unwillingly enough.

When I came on deck again the boat had returned, bringing George Pattison and our four lads, in charge of another Turkish officer and one of his men. George Pattison went straight to his cabin, and we all set to work with what show of eagerness we could muster. The Turkish captain was so far pleased with us that he and his officer soon joined George Pattison, thereby not adding greatly to his peace of mind, we might be sure. His followers at once took this for a signal to relax their vigilance, and so disappeared below in twos and threes, until at last the deck was free of their hated presence.

Ned and I were due to turn in, and, utterly weary and drenched to the skin, we did not think to be long about it. But Thomas Lurting signalled to us to join him, where he sat with his back to the mainmast, and presently the others gathered round us there. Night had fallen, and it was bitterly cold. There was a lull in the weather, and every now

and then would come a great tear in the black clouds which streamed across the sky, and the stars would shine down serenely upon us, only to be engulfed again in darkness.

'I can't understand you, sir,' said Sam. 'When the warning came, I could have sworn you were afraid, like the rest of us. But now we've been taken, and are in a fair way to being sold into slavery, bust me if you show a sign of it!'

'There is nothing to be afraid of now!' said Thomas Lurting. 'I know we shall not go to Algiers. Is not that enough? If you do as I tell you, I'll save you as well as myself.'

'How?' asked Jem despairingly.

'I can't say. I don't rightly know as yet. They are armed to the teeth, as ye've all seen. But I know we're going to prevail.'

'I've given up hope, boys!' said Davy quietly. 'Poor Bessie's children will beg their bread. Will they ever know what became of me, I wonder?'

'My old mother will die, that's certain!' said Slim. 'I wish she could have ended her days in peace.'

'I'll kill a round dozen of them if I don't get back to my girl!' swore Red Rodger, tugging at his tawny hair. He was a hot-tempered man.

'Come, lads, enough of this!' said Lurting.

'What if we should overcome the Turks, and go to Majorca after all?'

'Why then, pigs will fly!' said Ned cheerfully. 'But I've seen stranger things at sea. And what are you going to do to our friends and brothers, anyhow?'

'I'll kill one or two for you!' growled Sam.

'I'll cut as many throats as you like!' offered Rodger.

'If you so much as plot to touch one of them, I'll tell the Turks myself!' said Lurting.

'So you'd turn traitor, would you?' sneered Sam.

'I'll turn Christian!' rejoined Lurting. 'Listen to me, men; if you'll be ruled, I'll act for you; if not, I'll do nothing. Will you trust me?'

'Ay, ay!' said Ned and I at once, and the others joined in with varying degrees of warmth.

'Then if the Turks bid you do anything, do it without grumbling, and with as much diligence and quickness as you can. That will please them and cause them to let us be together. Understand?'

'Ay, ay, sir!' said we all.

'Then that's enough for to-night. Turn in, all who may. And remember what I have told you.'

We lingered behind after the others had scattered. 'Don't you turn in, sir?' we asked.

He shook his head. 'Time enough for that when all's well!' he replied.

'What *are* you going to do?' asked Ned impetuously. 'Even if you could overcome your delightful, though far too numerous, relations—which you can't, for they're most unamicably armed to the teeth!—you'll have the whole hive buzzing round your ears from the man-o'-war yonder.'

Lurting nodded. 'That man-o'-war is my difficulty,' he confessed.

'And a plaguy awkward one too!' commented Ned. 'The trouble about these brethren, as I've said before, is that there's too many of them, and they've got uncommonly sharp teeth.'

Lurting tweaked his ear for him, just as he used to do in the old days. 'Turn in, Ned, turn in!' he laughed, 'and rest that saucy tongue of yours! You may say what you will, lads, but this I know. We shall not go to Algiers.'

CHAPTER X

Betrayed at Majorca

NEXT morning the man-o'-war had vanished. We could hardly believe our eyes, but it was so. We had parted company from her during the night, and by reason of the continuing bad weather she did not come within sight of us again.

Thomas Lurting spent a long hour that morning with George Pattison, the while we redoubled our efforts, so that the Turkish captain should not notice his absence. When he came up on deck again he laid a hand on my shoulder as I passed. 'I ain to have my will in the matter, provided there is no bloodshed!' he muttered under his breath. 'Be sure they suspect nothing.'

Ned ran past along the swayin' deck, and purposely jostled against us. 'Ugly-Mug has just missed you!' he whispered.

Instantly, Lurting's voice was raised in abuse, and I was sent flying to the bowsprit, with Ned and Slim at my heels. He sounded as if he might have been raging for the past half hour. The rest of that day we had full reason to curse our luck, for the Turkish captain's slightest whim was enough to send us from one end of the rigging to the other,

and we had only snatched a moment of hard-earned respite to be sent, with a kick or an oath, to wait upon our captors with food and drink of a quality we poor fellows never saw.

As night fell the rain came down in torrents, and added to our misery. The Turkish captain and his officer turned in with George Pattison, and Thomas Lurting very civilly begged another of them, one of the biggest rascals of all, to lie down in the comfort of his own cabin. Later he sought out another of them, and then another, until under the pretext of finding especially comfortable quarters for them, away from the driving rain, he had persuaded them all to turn in. But not one of us would he suffer out of his sight, though we were all half dead with fatigue.

'Richard!' said he at last, 'you are the youngest, and therefore can doubtless run the fastest. You shall come with me.'

'What are you going to do, sir?' asked Sam.

'Disarm them!' he replied.

'Then we'll all come with you!' cried the men.

'Not so!' smiled Lurting. 'The temptation might prove too strong for some of you. Besides which, if one of them awakens and raises the alarm, then only I am caught, and the rest of you will live to try again under George Pattison. I must take the lad to carry the arms, but if the worst comes to

the worst, he must run away and let the blame fall where it belongs. Come, Richard!

I did not wait to argue. I knew in my own mind that I would stand by him, cost what it might, and that was enough for me. But the venture passed off harmlessly enough, incredible though it may seem. Not a Turk stirred.

We went to the master's cabin first, and found the captain sprawling in the master's bunk, while George Pattison lay awake on the floor, seemingly in perfect content. Lurting raised the lantern he carried, and the two friends exchanged a long look. Something told me that the little man, couched so uncomfortably on the bare boards, was sending out all his soul to help us in our venture. Lurting turned swiftly to our unconscious foes, and handed over their arms to me. Ned crept down after us and, taking them from me as I became overloaded, passed them on to the others on deck. I was thankful for his help. At every heave of the boat I feared lest they would be shot out of my arms, to rouse the ship as with a clatter of old iron.

When all had been disarmed we met on deck again.

'Count them, Richard!' commanded Lurting. 'You know how many we took. And Slim, fetch some rope to fasten them together.'

He bound them all into a murderous-looking

bundle and, bidding us all remain where we were, hoisted it on to his powerful shoulders and took it below.

'He doesn't trust us so far!' grumbled Red Rodger.

'Well, would you?' asked Sam, grimly.

'No!' agreed Rodger. 'Especially you, old Squint-eye! I wouldn't trust you an inch further than I could see you, curse you!'

Lurting came back on deck, and stood for a while, paying no heed to us. The rain was slackening, and the weather grew somewhat calmer. A cold little breeze began to eddy about us, chilling us to the bone through our drenched clothing. I could have wept in utter weariness.

'Richard!' said Lurting suddenly.

'Ay, ay, sir?'

'Go down and get us a drink. We've hard work ahead of us to-night. Move warily lest you wake the Turks. Ned, you rascal, you can go with him if you'll hold your tongue.'

'Hard work!' whispered Ned in my ear as we hurried down together. 'Hard work! Slavery will seem an easy life compared with this. Stir your stumps, lad, or you'll be waking our friends and brothers yonder. Gad! I wonder Thomas Lurting wants to have a drink without rousing them up to join in!'

When we got 'back the men were whispering together; Thomas Lurting was pacing the deck. Calling us round him, he bade us take a good pull and mark his words. 'Now we have the Turks at our command, no man shall hurt any of them. If you do, I will be against you. But this we will do; now that they are under deck we will keep them so and go for Majorca. Now, hearkye: the nearer we are to Majorca before they find us out, the better; and the quicker we get there the better too, for their man-o'-war must still be seeking us. So to work, every mother's son of you! Davy, you've a steady head on your shoulders; take Ned and Richard and mount guard over the doors. If any Turks appear, send them below forthwith; if need be, let one or two come forth, but shed no drop of blood. Now then, lads, jump to it! Hands by the halcyards!'

He hissed his orders, and the men went about their work with an uncanny precision and quietness. We mounted guard for a while, until we were relieved by Slim, Jem, and Joe, when up we went to take our turn on deck. Morning was breaking in shimmering, rain-washed radiance, and the coast of Majorca was stretched across the horizon, before any stirred down below. Then Joe came up to report that one of the Turks had looked out, uttered an exclamation of dismay, and hurried back again.

'Be careful of the door!' commanded Lurting. 'We shall soon know what they are going to do.'

We soon did, for instead of the sounds of violence which we expected, there arose pitiful wails of panic, and two or three of the Turks rushed up on deck, to fall on their knees before Thomas Lurting. 'No sell us! No sell us!' they cried, and prostrated themselves at his feet.

'Go back!' said he firmly and slowly, so that they might understand what he said. 'We wish you nothing but good.'

They returned below like lambs, and Lurting went to the master's cabin, where the same dread seized upon the Turkish captain as had struck to the heart of his men. 'No sell us!' he pleaded in broken tones. They knew very well the hell to which they had condemned us.

George Pattison and Thomas Lurting would as soon have sold each other, and as for the rest of us, we had no option. The Turks were securely hidden in the hold even as I had once been, and we were all strictly bidden to conceal their presence from the Spaniards. George Pattison decided to do his business as expeditiously as he might, and so went ashore as soon as we had cast anchor, taking with him Slim, Davy, Jem, and Joe. The rest of us were left on guard, with the Turks safely under hatches. Thomas Lurting awaited the return of

the boat somewhat anxiously. 'If only he brings none back with him!' he muttered.

My mind misgave me when I saw his guest. He was an old friend of his, it seemed, a stout English skipper called Toby Watchet. He had a rubicund face and a hearty laugh, and a swaying gait to his walk. I would not have trusted him an inch, but George Pattison was something of a saint in these matters. I waited on them at supper, and my heart was in my mouth many a time for fear lest our secret should be betrayed. The Spanish wine they had brought aboard was heady stuff, and George Pattison was so innocent he would have trusted the devil himself.

At last, out it came. 'Can ye keep a secret, Toby?' asked the master.

'Ay, that I can, if it be worth the keeping!'

I could think of only one thing to do. I stumbled purposely and spilt the wine over the table, hoping to divert their attention. But they only cursed me for a clumsy young fool, and took up the story where they had left it. Toby Watchet burst into roars of laughter, his jolly red face purpling as he guffawed. 'You simpletons!' he roared. 'You precious simpletons! Come, I'll buy two or three of them myself! You'll not make a stiff price for an old friend, will you?'

'No price at all, Toby!' said George Pattison

firmly. 'I marvel that you should understand me so little.'

Toby Watchet began to sulk. 'You fools!' he growled. 'Don't you know they're worth two or three hundred pieces of eight each—*each*, mark you? If you must needs throw good money away, you might at least give another fellow a chance.'

George Pattison was beginning to look aghast at his mistake. Thomas Lurting brought his fist down on the table. 'Understand this!' he said. 'If they were worth as many thousands we would not sell them. God willing, we'll send them home again where they belong!'

The old skipper looked round, swearing under his breath: 'Boy!' said he, 'get me my things!'

I obeyed, and helped him on with his coat, and put his stick into his hand. He was not a little drunk, so I slipped my hand under his arm, after he had said a sullen good-bye, and assisted him as best I might for his great weight. A sudden idea struck me. 'I wish you would take me ashore, sir!' I whispered in his ear.

'What'sh thish? Why?' he grumbled.

'I've not been allowed out of their sight—I want a little fun—come on, sir! You're the kind of skipper who understands a fellow, aren't you?'

'Courshe I am! Want to give those pious

Quakersh the shlip, do you? You're a lad after my heart! Jump for it when you get the 'chance!'

I helped him over the side, watched for my opportunity, and jumped down into the boat. The men pushed off into the darkness at once. Sam shouted for Lurting, and I saw his stern face in the light of the lanterns as he ordered me back. I lay low in the thwarts of the boat, and the uproar died upon the waters as we were pulled swiftly away from them.

Toby Watchet patted me on the shoulder, and took a pull from a bottle, which he had hauled up from his capacious pocket. 'Shmart boy!' he chuckled. 'Handy, shmart boy you are! Too good for Quakersh!—queer folk, Quakersh—always waiting on the Lord—we'll nip in while they're waiting, eh boy? Good, boy! I'll shee you come to no harm.'

I helped him ashore, and he stood leaning heavily on my shoulder while he told his men to wait for him. 'You come along with me,' said he. 'I may need you.' He sniggered to himself. 'They'll shay I was drunk! But you can tell 'em it's true—eh? Shmart boy!'

He hobbled along towards the town, and I kept close beside him. I knew perfectly well what he was going to do, but George Pattison would never believe it of him unless I had more proof. We

passed along a narrow, cobbled way; it was very dark, and there was nobody about. Then I saw a faint light, and the skipper dived under an archway into a small courtyard with an ancient fountain in it, and a great tree with rustling leaves. A couple of servants sprang up from nowhere, and would have turned us out; but old Toby gave some kind of a password, whereupon we were admitted to a small, empty room on the ground floor.

We were kept waiting a long time. At last the door opened slowly and a tall man entered, bearing a heavy silver candlestick. He set it down and put his finger to his lips until he had shut the door. Then he admonished my companion severely; at least, I judged him to be doing so, though I did not know enough Spanish to understand what he said. I jumped to the conclusion, probably not so very far wrong, that there was some more or less disreputable connexion between them. He was a very fine gentleman, exquisitely dressed, and he had the cruellest face it had ever been my lot to see, even counting the Turkish captain's. Toby Watchet cringed before him, and then stammered out a flood of halting Spanish. I craned my ears for familiar words—*secreto*—Quaker—*diez*—*Turqués*—I knew his story only too well.

Suddenly the grandee turned to me, and ad-

dressèd me sharply in Spanish. I shook my head. He frowned, and spoke what English he could muster, as if he disdained it. 'He say you tell me if he spik true. He say ten Turks on English ship; master fool, no sell, no fight! Well?'

I hesitated. The obvious thing to do was to agree with him. Our secret was out now, and the one important thing for me to do was to get back on board and warn the master. On the other hand, there was just a chance that without my corroboration, our very unpleasant host would dismiss the whole unlikely tale as a figment of Toby's drunken imagination. 'Anyhow, I had given my word to Thomas Lurting.

'You no speak?' purred that sinister voice. 'I make you!'

I waited for no more. I knocked over the candlestick and fled. How I got away with a whole skin I know not to this day. I tore open the door before his lordship could reach me in the darkness and confusion, and burst through with such suddenness that I upset the two lackeys, who had been listening at the keyhole. I probably owed my life to their curiosity, for my way was then clear to the street. By the time my pursuers had raised a hue and cry after me I was almost out of their clutches. I had no time to think. Dashing down to the deserted quay, I plunged into the water and swam



They hauled me up, gasping like a half-dead fish

out into the darkness. The hubbub on shore subsided as they scattered in search of me. Fortunately, nobody had seen me dive. I trod water while I divested myself of as much of my clothing as I could, and then settled down to the long swim ahead of me. I knew where our boat was anchored and was pretty sure I could reach her. The water was bitterly cold.

How old Ned came to be on deck looking out for me we never knew. His suggested reasons were many and varied, from a nocturnal fishing expedition to an attack of sickness resultant upon overmuch contemplation of the Turkish captain's moustache. However that might be, he heard my faint cry from the water and sounded the alarm. They hauled me up, gasping like a half-dead fish, and I lay on the deck half frantic because I could not get a word out to tell them of their danger. Ned wrapped me in a blanket, and Thomas Lurting raised me in his arms and forced a measure of brandy between my chattering teeth. Still I could not speak. Then George Pattison knelt down at my side and looked into my face: 'You have something to tell me!' he said gently.

Suddenly words came. 'Yes, sir!' I whispered. 'You have been betrayed. Your friend went straight to a Spanish nobleman, and told him—about *them*!'

The little master looked deeply hurt. 'But——' he began

'I knew he would,' I said, 'but I knew you would not believe it until I made sure. So I went with him and saw all that happened. I'm sorry I ran away!'

'You say little, but I think you have been in peril of your life!' said George Pattison firmly. 'We must hear the whole story when you have slept. Meanwhile—Thomas, send for our friends from below!'

The Turks came tumbling up half asleep. I saw them as it were in a dream, for an intense weariness was stealing over me.

'My friends,' said George Pattison, 'you are in great danger. Unless you will help us, the Spaniards will board us in the morning, or overtake us if we have set sail, and capture you from us. What are you prepared to do?'

The men set up a wailing, but the captain bowed before him with some dignity. 'Sir, we are all at your service,' said he. 'Command us; we shall obey.'

'Then with God's help we may yet escape,' said George Pattison. 'But first, Thomas, bear the lad away and lay him in my cabin. He has done his share of this day's work.'

Thomas Lurting raised me gently in his strong

arms. I had a vague impression of fair-skinned and dark-skinned seamen all eagerly stripping themselves for work, and then I allowed myself to give way before my overpowering longing for rest. Others could tell how we gave the Spaniards the slip, and sailed out before the dawn. I only remember the comfort of the master's bunk, and the blessed peacefulness of sleep.

CHAPTER XI

Into the Lion's Den

WERE ever honest, well-intentioned men in such a predicament before? We sailed the Mediterranean for eight or nine days, dodging hither and thither, avoiding the English and the Spaniards because of our strange passengers, and always in deadly peril of Turkish men-o'-war. When the Turkish captain was on deck we were sailing for Algiers; when he was safely below, for London. To add to our complications, we suffered from contrary winds and erratic weather conditions. Our men began to grumble because of the delay, and because we put into no port.

'You treat the Turks better than you do us!' growled Sam, as he watched them carrying away the best part of our provisions.

'They are strangers; we must treat them well!' said Thomas Lurting.

Sam shrugged his shoulders and moved off, muttering as he went that this blessed Quakerism would be the death of us all, strike him pink if it wouldn't!

I had been told off to wait upon them. At first Ned shared the task, but he reduced me to such a helpless state with laughter, at his antics that

Thomas Lurting punished us for our bad manners by separating us, and bade me continue alone. Ned had a different nickname for each of them. He would hail me with 'Hey! Richard! The most honourable Ugly-Mug 'wants a drink!' or 'Good hunting, Richard! Brother Satan has a flea in his beard!'

Thomas Lurting scowled on us when he caught us. 'How dare you insult my friends!' he said, and so put an end to our frolics.

As time slipped by and we made no port, I felt them beginning to grow restive. I reported this to Thomas Lurting one day, and he nodded gravely. 'When they suspect that we are not going to Algiers, I fear they will rise,' he said. 'It is time we came to some decision concerning them, and yet I can't see my way. We might as well put into the mouth of hell as put into Algiers. And they will say the same of London. There's nothing for it but waiting, Richard.'

'What do you do when you wait?' I asked.

'I do the job that is nearest to hand, and all the time I'm—praying. If waiting upon God means doing nothing, I'm no Quaker, Richard. But it doesn't. It means going as far as you can see, and keeping your eyes open for signals. They come all right. I know that.'

'And this rising will come!' I warned him.

'I know that too!' he said.

It came sooner than I expected, and if only I had been a little more nimble-witted I might have prevented it. For they were all squatting together below decks over their meal, and I had just brought them a last drink, when I saw the flash of knives. I suppose I was taken by surprise. I knew their arms were safely concealed, and none of us had ever so much as dreamed that they could have any hidden about them. I started as I set the drink down, and the captain looked up quickly.

'Richard!' said he, 'you stay here!'

'Of course, sir!' I rejoined, smiling in a desperate effort to retrieve my mistake, and dissemble my fear. 'You want something?'

He smiled too, a slow, detestable smile which chilled me to the heart. 'Oh, no, Richard!' he purred. 'You nice boy—like see you here!'

They talked faster than ever, and the knives flashed openly now. Several of them had them, and they were apportioning them to the best fighters amongst their company. It made me feel a little sick, to realize that they cared nothing now whether I saw them or not. I wondered if they would cut my throat before they went on deck.

I watched my opportunity like a cat watching a mouse, only in this instance, the positions were

reversed. Little by little I edged back from where I was, trying to manœuvre myself into 'a position where I could make a run for it. If only I could warn the master in time he could clap down the hatches. As it was, I knew half our men were asleep. It seemed an hour before I had moved a few inches. Suddenly one of them looked up and saw me. I knew then that it was now or never. I turned and ran for my life.

The picture of that moment's effort is painted indelibly on my memory, and it always brings back with it the nightmare feeling of inevitability with which I made it. Such a small distance to run, and all the odds against me! A couple of knives whizzed past me, and one of them tore through the flesh of my right arm as I ran. Then in a moment it was all over, and I was lying on my face at the foot of the ladder, with the whole pack of them on top of me. I stopped struggling. I was waiting for the knife in my back which was to end it all.

The captain turned me over, keeping his hand upon my mouth lest I should cry out. 'They not kill you!' he said with a grim smile. 'You my slave. Ver' good slave—I know, because I watch. You make no noise?'

I shook my head, and began to struggle again more furiously than ever. He issued some sharp

orders to his men, and in a moment I was gagged and bound securely, and lying at his feet. He put his foot on my chest and gave me one of his slow, cruel smiles. 'You ver' foolish do that!' he said. 'I punish you—way you no like. Take long time. Now we go on deck drown little man—he no good slave. And bind big man and spit on him!'

I couldn't stand that. I gave one unexpected heave and overbalanced him. It nearly cost me my life, for half a dozen knives were at my throat. But the captain contented himself with kicking my helpless body and inviting his men to do the same. 'The rest can wait!' he assured me, and so passed out of my sight. The others followed him, leaving me sobbing with helpless fury. I had shot my bolt. I could do no more.

I listened miserably for the noise of strife. For a while nothing came, and then I heard a sound I knew well, Thomas Lurting stamping his foot on the deck as a message to the men below. He would not risk a shout, I thought. A spark would blow up the whole powder magazine. I heard the men rushing on deck, and then I heard Thomas Lurting's voice ringing out above the uproar: 'Rodger, put down that axe! Sam, drop that crowbar! They are Turks and we are Englishmen. Let it not be said that we are afraid of them!'

There were sounds from above my head, and

Ned came scrambling down. 'Quick, Richard! Where are you?' he called.

I made such sounds as I could muster, and in a trice he had found me and cut my bonds, swearing prodigiously the while. "

'Stow it, Ned!' I protested, as I staggered to my feet.

'But to think of old Ugly-Mug—curse it, lad! you're bleeding! Lean on my shoulder and make what speed you can. He won't send them below till he knows you're out of harm's way. Now then, up we go!'

Thomas Lurting was standing with his back to the main mast, and our men were grouped round him, the tools which they had snatched up for their defence lying unheeded at their feet. His eyes were fixed steadily on the Turks, who stood in a little sullen group round George Pattison—('we go on deck drown little man!'). The master looked as unconcerned as ever; he might have been taking a turn around the garden at home. When we appeared, Thomas Lurting's eyes never moved; nevertheless, he knew we were there. Without relaxing his gaze for one moment, he strode forward and laid a strong hand on the Turkish captain's shoulder. 'You had better go down again, my friend!' he said.

I held my breath. One knife thrust and all

would be over. The captain looked up wickedly, but before he could speak Thomas Lurting calmly went on: 'We cannot take you to Algiers because the master and I cannot let our men run the risk of being taken and sold into slavery. We saved you from it, and we must save them. Nor can we approach any of your men-o'-war. But to London you shall not go, nor into any Spanish port, but to the shores of your own country, and on this I give you my word.' With this he took his hand from the other's shoulder and held it out to him.

The Turk's hard face softened as he looked at that outstretched hand. He gripped it with his long brown fingers. 'I take your word!' he said, and passed below with all his men.

An hour or so later Joe came to tell Lurting that two of the Turks were fighting with knives in the hold, and Lurting called for the captain and bade him settle the matter. The captain took the knives and handed them over. 'You better put them with the rest!' he said, and this time his smile was not unpleasant. 'I could have stabbed you easily this afternoon—yes?'

'I know!' said Lurting, and went on deck again.

That evening he was closeted long with the master. When he came out he took me aside, and dressed the wound on my arm which Ned and I had patched up as best we might.

'What have you decided?' I asked curiously.

'We are going to make for the Barbary coast,' said he. 'And then—we shall see. Will you stand by me, Richard?'

'Always!' I said firmly. 'So will Ned.

'I know!' he rejoined. 'That's three of us, but one a mere lad and wounded—it's not enough. Still, we shall know when the time comes. Go down now and sleep.'

I knew he would not sleep. For two days and nights he maintained an unceasing vigilance, until at last we found ourselves on the Barbary coast, about six miles from shore. The sea was very calm, and the sun was shining. In the afternoon Thomas Lurting came to us where we were idling on the deck. 'Who will go with me, to set the Turks on shore?'

'I'll go!' cried I.

'And so will I!' said Ned.

Then there was silence. 'How many do you want, sir?' asked Slim cautiously.

'One more will suffice,' said Lurting.

'Three able men to ten? That's too little!' exclaimed Slim, and he backed hastily away.

Thomas Lurting went up to Sam and held out his hand. 'You and I have been good friends, Sam!' he said. 'Will you venture to go with me?'

Sam shrugged his shoulders. 'Yes, if the

master's willing,' said he. Nobody was more surprised than himself.

'Then that's enough,' said Lurting, and they shook hands.

'Do you trust me, lad?' he asked us.

'Yes!' said we all.

'Then act on your trust. Give me your word that you will not harm the Turks.'

We promised, though as Ned said afterwards, what harm could we have done them when we were more than twice outnumbered?

'Can't we strike a blow, even for our lives, sir?' asked Sam.

'When I say I can do no more, then you may shift for your lives!' was the reply. 'Remember, only when I say I can do no more!'

I thought to myself that that meant never, but I did not speak my thoughts.

George Pattison came up then, and Thomas Lurting went to him and asked for the boat. 'Thomas, are you sure?' asked the master, with a troubled look in his eyes.

'Quite sure!' was the steady reply.

They were silent for a while, and in that silence something passed between them which words could not have given. Then Lurting said firmly: 'I believe the Lord will preserve me, for I have nothing but goodwill in venturing my life, and I

know that he will preserve these lads who are with me. I tell you, I have not the least fear upon me but that all will be well.'

'Why not give them the 'boat?' asked George Pattison.

'If we give them the boat, they will get arms, and come back and take us with our own boat,' replied Lurting. 'And if we put half of them on shore at a time, they will raise the country and surprise us when we bring the other half. But if you will let me go, and these three will come with me, I will venture to put them on shore. There is no other way but to carry them all at once.'

George Pattison bowed his head. 'So be it, then, and God be with you!' he said.

Thomas Lurting wrung his hand, and then called the Turks up on deck.

'Do you know this place?' he asked.

'Very well,' said the captain.

'Are there any habitations near?'

'Four miles away—two towns—one of them nice place. I know it.'

'Is it far from Algiers?'

'I say fifty miles. Not more.'

'Then we go on shore. Will you make ready to come with us?'

They came quickly enough, and stood quietly

waiting for us. Sam looked at them sourly. 'You bind them, or I don't come!' said he.

'I'm not afraid of them,' said Lurting, 'and to bind them would only exasperate them. They're quiet enough now; let us keep them so. Come, let's hoist out the boat!'

Willing hands helped us, and she was soon ready. Lurting jumped down into her and threw the painter into the ship. 'Now ask the captain to come down to me!' he said.

The captain bowed low to George Pattison, flashed his teeth in a farewell smile to the rest, and went willingly enough. Lurting placed him in the stern.

'Next!' he shouted.

A great strapping fellow went promptly over the side, to find himself planted firmly in the captain's lap.

'Two more!' shouted Lurting.

These were placed on each side of the captain, and the next two put in their laps. The officer came next, and soon found himself pinned beneath one of the most stalwart of the men. The last two were treated similarly, and our dangerous cargo was complete. Thomas Lurting stood in the bows as cool as a cucumber. 'Now are you willing, Sam?' he asked.

'Ay, ay, sir!' agreed Sam.

'Then heave me over their arms; I've placed them ready on deck.'

Sam protested vehemently. 'You're not going to let them have their arms, sir?'

'It's madness!' cried Red Rodger.

'It's common honesty!' retorted Lurting. 'Are we pirates that we should steal their belongings? Come, come, I thought we were Englishmen!'

Sam shrugged his shoulders and heaved over the wicked-looking bundle. Lurting caught it dexterously, and set it behind him in the bows. I could see the Turks' eyes glisten as they looked at it.

'Now, Ned, the provisions!' rapped out Lurting. 'I placed them by the arms.'

Ned grinned as he handed down the package. 'What's this for, sir?' He asked. 'A banquet on the shore with all our brother Hottentots? If that's what you're after, don't ask me!'

'Ned, you rascal, come down and take an oar!' commanded Lurting. 'Sam, are you ready?'

'Can't we take our arms, sir?' pleaded Sam. 'You said if you gave the word we could shift for our lives.'

'What have you got?' asked Lurting.

'I've the carpenter's axe and the carpenter's adze, and I've the cooper's heading knife in my belt, sir.'

'Humph! You've been busy. Give Ned the

adze, to keep it out of harm's way, and let Richard have the axe.'

'But the boy can't use his right arm!' protested Sam.

'I know. That's why it's safer with him. Now then, jump to it, boys!'

Ned and Sam both took an oar, and I sat on the bow with the axe on my shoulder. Lurting sat on one side of the boat keeping an eye on the Turks, and playing absently with the boat-hook which he held in his hand. George Pattison leant over the gunwale, watching us go. I could almost feel his thoughts coming with us.

The boat was heavily weighed down at the stern, and with only two oars we moved but slowly. As I sat, my feet rested on the bundle containing the Turks' weapons, and I wondered if any of them were measuring the distance between them and me. Sam was grunting as he rowed. I could not wonder at his feeling a little uneasy. He was next to the Turks. 'This is a fool's errand of yours!' he grumbled.

'Sam!' said Lurting, 'remember, I trust you most of all. You and I are older than these lads, and it behoves us to keep cool.'

The shore was growing clearer now. It was very rocky, with little bays and inlets; a fine place for a boat to hide in, I thought, or men either, for

that matter. I wondered if there was anybody about. Suddenly I saw something move. 'Is that a boat?' I asked as I pointed.

Lurting shaded his eyes with his hand. 'No, it's a rock with the waves breaking over it,' said he. 'Give way, my lads, we shall get ashore in a little time.'

When we came to within thirty or forty yards of the shore he bade us turn the boat. 'Have a care of those bushes, Sam!' he commanded, as they shipped their oars. 'Give us a hail if you see anybody hiding in them. We've nothing to fear from the other end of the boat, but we mustn't risk an attack from the shore.'

He turned about to heave out the grapnel, and at that moment Sam shrieked out, 'Lord have mercy on us, there are Turks in the bushes on shore!'

Lurting stood up, still holding the grapnel in his hands. 'What's the matter?' he asked, and for the first time I heard a doubt in his voice."

'Positively, there's men in the bushes!' quavered Sam. 'God save us all!'

Fear swept over us in a wave of hysteria. For the first time I realized upon what a mad venture we were embarked. Thomas Lurting had turned his gaze from the Turks in the stern to the bushes on shore, and his face was white to the lips. He dropped the grapnel and shook his head. 'There's

no one there; it's a lie!' he said in a strangled voice.

By this time, our panic had communicated itself to our passengers, and the stern was in an uproar. The uppermost Turks were jerked violently to their feet by the struggles of those beneath, and the boat rocked dangerously to and fro.

'They're on us, sir!' screamed Sam.

'Lay your oars across the boat!' commanded Lurting. Ned obeyed readily; snatching up Sam's oar, he placed it with his own to form a frail barrier between us.

'You said we could shift for our lives, sir!' gasped Sam, pulling at his knife.

'You may take up such arms as you have,' said Lurting steadily, 'for God forbid that I should lay my conscience on you. But you gave me your word that you would do nothing until I said I could do no more, and I hold you to it. Come, come, lads, don't you trust me any more? And you, Sam, with your men in the bushes, how dare you put us in such a panic? Pull yourself together, man! Who's to keep cool if you don't? You nearly made me afraid, let alone these lads. Let us be men, not cowards!'

The Turks were all on their feet now, for Sam's knife had added fuel to the flames. The boat was threatening to upset at any moment. Thomas

Lurting waited for a second or so, while we steadied it as best we could. His eyes were on the Turks, but I think his mind was seeking God. They were shouting and gesticulating, some making towards us, and others pulling them back. The captain rushed forward in a frenzy, foaming at the mouth. Lurting struck him a smart blow with the handle of the boat-hook. 'Pull yourself together, captain, and sit down!' he commanded. 'I'll have no panic aboard this boat.'

The captain sat down in his place, and Lurting swiftly arranged them all as they had been before. 'Now you see what it is to be afraid!' he said as he returned to us. 'That is the biggest danger that ever we were in, and it was of our own making. What shall we do now?'

'Get back to the ship!' growled Sam.

'Not so,' rejoined Lurting. 'God willing, I will put them on shore. For they'll come quietly near the shore, but if we carry them on board they'll rise. If it were I, I'd rise ten times over, and so will they. On shore we must put them.'

We rowed along the coast till we came to a small rocky island. 'What about this?' suggested Ned. 'Can't we leave 'em here, and let them admire the view till some one comes along?'

Lurting looked doubtful. 'Shall we leave you here?' he asked the Turkish captain pleasantly.

'Ugly-Mag doesn't like it!' grinned Ned. 'I knew he wouldn't. Oh Lord, we'll be rowing them into Algiers soon!'

'There's the place!' cried Lurting, and he pointed to a little bay with a stream running into it. We could see a mile or so inland, and there was nobody about. The Turkish captain nodded eagerly, so Ned and Sam rowed as fast as they might, and the more readily at the prospect of getting rid of them.

When we were near land we turned the boat and hove out the grapnel, and the Turks jumped out and waded ashore. We handed over the provisions, and then the bundle of arms. When these last had been put ashore, the captain waded out again and held out his lean, brown hand to Lurting.

'You keep your word,' said he. 'You bring us back—you return our arms—I think you brave man!'

Thomas Lurting shook hands with him warmly.

'I shall love our friends and brothers better when we're a bit farther away!' whispered Ned. 'Now they've got their teeth back, there's over many of them for my fancy!'

The captain was making for the beach again when he suddenly turned back. 'You come with us?' he urged. 'We no harm you, I give my word!

You come in to ~~town~~—fine town, plenty good wine—we like brothers—come!

'Not likely!' growled Sam under his breath.

'What about it, lads?' asked Lurting.

'Much as I love my friends and brothers—no!' replied Ned, and I nodded my agreement with him.

'For my part, I'd gladly venture!' smiled Lurting, and he meant it. 'However, we must needs make for the ship again, it seems. Farewell, my friends, and God be with you all!'

We watched them climb up the cliffs, and they turned back and waved to us and we to them. Then we rowed back swiftly, glad for the most part to be free of our dangerous burden. George Pattison was still leaning over the gunwale. He held out his hand to Thomas Lurting, who grasped it warmly, but said nothing. We tumbled on to the deck, and heaved up the boat.

'Never again!' growled Sam. 'Not on your life!' He slouched away in search of a drink, and his straight eye gave Thomas Lurting one look as he passed. And in that look I saw that henceforth he would be willing to venture with him unafraid, even into the very jaws of death.

Ned went up to Lurting and held out his hand. 'May I?' he asked.

'Why so?'

'Because I'd like to remember that on this day I shook hands with the bravest man I'm ever likely to know!'

Lurting shook his hand and mine, and then looked out to sea, and bit his lip. 'Skip along, lads, skip along!' he roared suddenly. 'The wind's set fair for England!'

CHAPTER XII

'When you are back in England'

AS we came up the Thames we found that we were in a fair way towards becoming famous. The river was full of shipping, and many of the merchant captains who had heard of our capture by the Turks hove to and hailed us to know how we had been rescued. When they got the truth, it seemed to be past believing, and word quickly spread from ship to ship that there was a Quaker ketch coming up the river which had redeemed itself from the Turks with never a gun.

George Pattison paid little heed to all this, and Thomas Lurting put off our questioners as best he could. However, when we were nearing Greenwich a small boat put out, with word that the King and Duke of York were there, and would speak with us. Thomas Lurting promptly sent for me. 'Shall I hide you in the hold again?' he asked.

'I thank you, no!' I replied, as firmly as I might.

'You know who may be with them?' he insisted.

'I do!' said I.

He looked at me thoughtfully, and gave me his old smile. 'Dear lad, I think the time has come,' said he quietly.

'I think it has!' I agreed, and he shook me by the hand and said no more.

Ned and I were hanging in the shrouds as we came in. We saw the tall figures of the King and the Duke of York, and their even taller cousin, Prince Rupert, standing on the quayside awaiting us. A group of lords and ladies loitered in the background. I could not see my father, but I knew he was there. We had scarcely landed when Mr. Pepys hustled up and boarded us, and went down into the master's cabin to have speech with him. The King called Thomas Lurting down, and he jumped ashore and stood before him and the Duke, answering all their questions. Dear fellow, it mattered little to him whether he was facing captains or pirates, mutinous seamen or monarchs; he was every inch a man. He stood straight as a die, with his head thrown back, and the breeze lifting the light hair on his brow. His blue eyes looked straight into the King's brown ones.

'You're the man for my navy!' muttered the Duke of York.

'I crave your pardon, but I shall not serve your, turn!' rejoined Lurting.

'Enough of that for now!' said King Charles, silencing his royal brother with a wave of his long hand. 'Tell us first which of my men-o'-war you

have seen in the Mediterranean, and which of them protected you.'

'We have seen none of them, sir,' said Lurting quietly. 'We do not need your men-a'-war.'

'Indeed?' smiled the King. 'They're so plaguily expensive I sometimes wish I did not need them either. But now tell us how you freed yourselves.'

Briefly and simply, Thomas Lurting told our story. The King listened with such interest that he almost forgot to smile, but at the end his eyes twinkled irresistibly. 'My good fellow,' he said, 'you should have brought your precious Turks back to me. We should have known what to do with them, shouldn't we, brother?'

'I think they are better in their own country,' said Lurting simply.

The royal brothers laughed. 'Obviously!' agreed the King. 'Obviously! But who cares?'

'I do, sir!' said Lurting calmly.

'You're a brave fellow,' said the King suddenly. 'How many had you in that boat?'

'Two men of our own, and a lad with an injured arm.'

'Humph! That lad yonder?'

Lurting nodded. 'Come down, Richard!' he said, and I jumped down with Ned hard on my heels.

The King looked at me, and his eyes narrowed suddenly. 'What's this?' he said. 'Come here!'

I came close to him, and he looked keenly into my face. I had grown so much of late that he scarcely needed to look downwards, tall though he was. My heart was pounding furiously. I felt no fear at all.

'What is your name?' he asked.

'Richard Croly, so please your Majesty!' I replied.

'You could not lie to me, that is certain, with your parentage written so clearly in your face. But Croly—hm! that's as may be. Summon Lord Croly, Rupert!'

My father detached himself from the little group of courtiers, and strode across to us. I bowed to him and to the King, and then stood waiting.

'It seems that you have done this nobleman a grievous wrong!' said the King.

'I know it!' I agreed.

'You acknowledge it!' exclaimed the King in astonishment.

'I acknowledge it. Had I done my duty as a son I would have sought out my father long ago, instead of arriving in the nick of time to save him from a deadly sin. I came to him in hate when I should have come to him in love, and I am sorry

for it. I await his pleasure and yours, your Majesty.

The King turned to my father. "He puts himself at your mercy, my lord!" said he. "I don't know that I'd risk it myself. Do you understand what you are doing, young man?"

"I do, sir."

"Supposing your affectionate father has a fancy to send you on your travels again, what then?"

"I shall not run away from him, sir."

"Even if you find yourself at Algiers?"

"There are worse places than Algiers, sir."

"What places?"

"There is hell, sir!" I looked into my father's face and saw it there. "Father!" I said, "I know, and you know, that I am your son, and that my mother is your lawful wedded wife. You cannot disavow me as you have disavowed her, because I bear your likeness in my face. Do not think I ask anything of you, sir. I have seen too much of late years to come to you with any threat or plea. I have grown to manhood in a rough school, and God be thanked! I can make my own way in life, and hers too. I do not ask you to acknowledge me. I do not ask you to acknowledge her. I do not claim my inheritance of you, and I would disdain to claim it. Whether I live or die is in your hands; but I do not ask you for life. I only leave this

word with you, that in the eyes of God and man, you are not free.'

I felt Ned and Lurting close beside me, and their friendship seemed to buoy me up. The King gave me a strange look, with something in it of compassion, and something, queerly enough, of envy. 'Had I such a son, my lord, I think I would own him!' he said.

My father came close to me, and we looked straight into each other's eyes. 'I have such a son, your Majesty!' he said slowly. 'And I do own him—and her—in the eyes of God and man, so help me God!'

He turned stiffly and strode away. I was never to look upon his face again.

Lurting was breathing heavily, as if he had been making some great physical effort. 'Have we your permission to go?' he asked.

The King seemed to shake himself back into his customary disguise of flippancy. 'Gladly!' he laughed. 'For faith! you don't belong here, any of you. But who is your friend, Richard? He looked like knifing somebody just now, Quaker or no Quaker!'

'Edward Farrant, at your Majesty's service' said Ned.

'Farrant!' began the King indignantly.

'Sir Edward Farrant's son!' interposed Prince

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Rupcrt, stepping forward. 'He ran away to find me at sea when his father—made that unfortunate mistake. I thought we should have seen him here sooner.'

'Not with my father in disgrace!' muttered Ned.

'There speaks loyalty,' said King Charles, 'and that's a rare bird, as my father found to his cost. Young man, tell Sir Edward that we shall be glad to see him at court, if his son brings him. And that will be one gain from this day's work, for it seems to me that my brother has found and lost a gallant captain in Thomas Lurting, and Lord Croly has found and lost a son.'

Mr. Pepys came out of the master's cabin, all agog with excitement. 'An extraordinary story, your Majesty!' he exclaimed.

'We know all about it, Mr. Pepys!' smiled the King. 'And a good deal more besides! Tell these good fellows to get clear away before my press gang gets wind of them. Au revoir, mes amis! If you serve your king as well as you serve your God, I shall be well served, confound you!'

'The Duke of York stopped me as I was about to climb on deck. He laid a hand on my arm, and looked at me very strangely. 'You are not afraid?' he asked.

'No, sir!'

'You learned that from——'

From Thomas Lurting, sir!

'He can stand up and tell his King to his face that he does not worship as the law directs, nor bear arms as the duty of subject entails!'

'Your highness,' said I hesitatingly, 'what he acknowledges before his God, he is not afraid to acknowledge before his King.'

'Then he fears God——'

'More than any other power, sir.'

'And you?'

'I have learned my lesson, sir!'

He released me then. I have never forgotten the look upon his face.

We were about to move away when Prince Rupert came close to the side of the vessel. 'Thomas Lurting!' he called.

Lurting came to the gunwale and leaned over. Prince Rupert was a man of prodigious height, and his dark face was raised up to the younger man's fair one. A look of agony crossed it. 'When you were on—*that* coast—did you see ought of my brother Maurice?'

We all knew of Prince Rupert's dread lest his favourite brother, Prince Maurice, long since drowned, should in reality have been captured and enslaved. Lurting bent pityingly towards him. 'It is not there that we shall look to find your brother, sir!' he said. 'God comfort you.'

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The tall prince still kept his hand on the landing rope. 'If I knew for certain——', he muttered.

'God knows and the deep knows, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!' said Thomas Lurting gravely.

We cast off then and moved slowly up the Thames. I felt as if I were beginning life anew.

'What are you going to do?' asked Ned.

'God willing, I shall make a home for my mother in the New World. It is better for—all of us, that this should be so. I shall go straight to her when we have been paid off. Only——'

'Only what?'

'I shall first ride into Hertfordshire.'

'So shall I, before I go to Fayne.'

'To Fayne?'

'I told her I would come.'

I looked at Ned and sighed. 'Ned, you old dog!' I said, 'the good old times are over.'

'Not so, Richard!' said Lurting as he passed. 'Do you not know that they are always being reborn?'

A week later we three rode together into Hertfordshire. Lurting had sent them word when first we had touched land, so that we were not unexpected. But we ourselves had not expected to see Theresa Fayne. Even her old nurse fell discreetly back when Ned leapt from his horse. His old

impetuosity dropped from him, and he stood abashed before her youth and loveliness, like the true English gentleman he was. 'Why—madam—my lady—Theresa!' he stammered, and she came to him like a bird to its nest.

We left them, for they took little heed of us, and so came into the old orchard and found my mother waiting there. I caught her in my arms, protesting wildly.

'I dared not come to meet you, dear!' she whispered. 'I could not tell, until you were really here, whether God had truly brought you back to me. God forgive me for doubting his goodness, but—your father——'

'I have seen him, Mother!' said I.

She put her little hands to her mouth as if she would have stifled a scream, but said no word.

'I have seen him and it is over between us. He has acknowledged me and you, Mother.'

'And that is all?'

'That is all, dear!'

She rested her head on my breast, and was silent. My little mother! She did not reach my shoulder now! I held her closely to me and stroked her soft curls. Then she swayed a little, and Mistress Mallory came and took her from me. 'God bless my own dear son!' she whispered as she went.

I sat for a long while in the orchard, and Thomas Lurting joined me there. 'What are you thinking about, Richard?' he asked. 'Making plans?'

'Ay!' I replied.

'It is good to make plans when you're young, lad, but hearkye, do not try to look too far ahead.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'I am a simple man, Richard, far simpler than you or Ned, dear lads of mine that you are, but I can tell you this: life ashore is like life at sea, and the only thing that matters is whether God's at the helm. Fair or foul, fog, rain or tempest, we then have all we need!'

I would have spoken, but just then Ned and Theresa came through the trees.

'Forgive me, Cousin Richard,' she pleaded. 'I never even spoke to you when you came, but——'

'You showed your admirable good sense by preferring me, my love!' interposed Ned coolly.

She made a little *moue* at him and continued: 'I begged your mother to come to Fayne; it was her right and my privilege. And then when we had word that you were coming, and where you were coming, this seemed to be the place where we should all meet.'

'It is the place where we should all meet!' said Lurting.

'Ah, but I heresa, you never knew Christopher!' I said regretfully.

'I feel as if I had always known Christopher!' said she, looking into Ned's face.

Little Philippa came out from the house and joined us. She wore a white gown, and a spray of the first frail flowers of spring was fastened in her breast. 'Supper is ready!' she told us. 'It is long since you tasted food here, and you must need it after all your wanderings.'

'We need it as we need this place, before we wander again!' said Lurting.

She looked shyly up at him; her blue eyes were very like Christopher's. 'Must you wander?' she asked.

'It is as God wills!' he replied.

'And must Ned and—Richard wander too?'

'That also is as God wills, but I think Fayne will see the limit of Ned's wanderings very soon.'

Ned took Theresa's hand and led her into the house. I knew they walked in happiness. Thomas Lurting stood looking after them. 'Fair or foul, fog, rain or tempest, and God send it be fair!' said he, and he turned to us and smiled.

We lingered on a moment after the rest had gone. Philippa was caressing the frail blossoms on her heart as though she loved them. I noticed how those sunny curls clustered about her white neck.

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She hesitated a moment. 'Do you really go to the New World, Richard?' she asked.

I nodded. 'When I come back——' I began.

I heard a linnet's song in the old orchard. The first breath of spring was stealing upon the world, and we were very young.

'When you come back?' she whispered.

The answer came in a voice so like her own, so near, so very dear: 'When you are back in England, go into Hertfordshire!'

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